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A

MONITOR TO FAMILIES.

EDINBURGH,
PRINTED BY OLIVER & BOYD,
TWEEDDALE-COURT.

A

MONITOR TO FAMILIES;

OR,

DISCOURSES

ON SOME OF

THE DUTIES AND SCENES OF DOMESTIC LIFE.

By HENRY BELFRAGE, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, FALKIRK.

There is a treasure to be desired, and oil in the dwelling of the wise.
Prov. xxi. 20.

SECOND EDITION.

EDINBURGH;
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PREFACE.

Several volumes of Discourses have been of late addressed to families. Domestic religion is of so much importance to the welfare of families, to the prosperity of the church, and to the peace and virtue of society, as fully to justify all the solicitude which has been felt to promote it. While the design and the merits of such works must render them acceptable to good men, it will not be deemed presumptuous to say, that, in some of them, the topics are of too general a cast to be felt as peculiarly interesting in the domestic circle; and that while in others they have been more appropriate, they cannot be considered as having exhausted the subject.

It has appeared to the Author of this Volume, that there were several topics which had been little adverted to, and various scenes which are seldom regarded in the spirit of piety as to which religious counsel might be given with much advantage; and that those which had been repeatedly handled, required, from their peculiar importance, frequent enforcement, and might be illustrated and applied with the requisite variety. He has endeavoured to frame this work so as to answer these objects,—to

be minute without being low, and faithful without being harsh and severe. The application which is here made of the lessons of religion to so many of the employments, scenes, and relations of ordinary life, will be useful, he trusts, not only to those who are in the conditions described, but will lead to the extension of them to situations and circumstances which have escaped his notice, or to which the compass of his work rendered it impossible for him to advert.

He has avoided speculative discussions as unsuitable to the object of this work; and while it did not admit of the regular illustration of those great doctrines of Christian belief, which are the grand themes of the Gospel ministry, and in which is the life of a good man's spirit, he has, with the utmost pleasure, introduced evangelical topics and allusions, wherever it could be done, to comfort, to awe, or to stimulate.

In the happiness of families he feels the deepest interest; and if this volume is blessed for banishing from any dwellings tempers and habits unfriendly to peace and to holiness, and for forming in them the graces of the Spirit, the practice of piety, and the kindliness and harmony so pleasing to others, and so blissful to themselves, it will be the answer of his earnest prayers, and the fulfilment of his warmest wishes.

FALKIRK, August 20, 1824.

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A

MONITOR TO FAMILIES.

DISCOURSE I.

THE VALUE OF GRACE SHEWN IN THE FAMILY OF LAZARUS.

LUKE x. 42. *One thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.*

No scenes of our Saviour's life are more interesting to the heart than those which we witness in the house of Lazarus. Here we behold him manifesting all those amiable qualities which win our affection, and as in a quiet asylum from the malignity of the world, and from the strife of tongues, he enjoyed here some sweet intervals of repose. In contemplating his miracles we adore his Almighty power; in listening to his discourses we exclaim, "Never man spake like this man;" but in mingling with him in the house of Lazarus, our hearts breathe the wish that we could secure to our families such a visitor, such a counsellor, and such a friend.

In this family he did not occupy their attention with peevish details of the indignities he had met with, or with vain boasting of his wonders and success, as is too often the case with men who move in an eminent sphere, when they unbend in the retreats of domestic life, but applied himself to their instruction and improvement; and while his heart bled for their sorrows, he corrected their faults with a meekness of wisdom, a fidelity and a kindliness of manner, which could not fail to secure their amendment. Of all this we have a very beautiful example in this passage. Martha, from a wish to shew her respect for our Lord, was occupied in providing for him a sumptuous entertainment, and was irritated at her sister's leaving all the care and toil connected with it to her. She applies to our Saviour to bid Mary come to share a labour she thought requisite for the credit of the family, not to relieve her from it entirely. The complaint of Martha was not the language of one habitually fretful, insensible to the value of religion, and disposed to put the worst constructions on the temper and habits of its friends, but it arose from an undue concern about the Saviour's temporal accommodation, the folly of which she ought to have already learned from his uniform disregard of every thing like self-indulgence. For her sake, and for a lesson to others, who, by worldly cares, are tempted to neglect their eternal interests, our Lord, with great solemnity, wisdom, and goodness, tells her that her solicitude to provide for him a splendid feast was idle, and that it would be well for her also to seize this opportunity of improving in that excellence, and of advancing

to that salvation in which he should be glorified for ever.

In this discourse I shall illustrate this statement of the value of true religion, and then explain the choice which we ought to make of it.

1. In setting forth the value of religion, our Lord first exhibits its necessity.

The grace of God is necessary for men of all characters and conditions. It is necessary, not only for the chief of sinners, but for those who are free from the pollutions of the world, to sanctify the motives of action, and to purify the wishes of their hearts. It is necessary, not only for the atrocious criminal, whose days have been numbered by the sentence of the law, and whose villany has filled every heart with horror, but for the judge by whom his doom is pronounced, however eminent he may be for decorum of manners, and for the upright and zealous administration of justice. The propriety of conduct which results merely from a regard to character, and the discharge of duty which is prompted only by the dread of reproach, cannot be accepted by him, who requires that the conduct be governed by his fear and love.

The grace of God is needful not only to animate the industry, to sooth the sorrows, and to guard the integrity of the poor, but to kindle the gratitude, to prompt the benevolence, to maintain the humility, and to guide the charity of the rich. It would be well for the poor if they felt that the absence of this grace was their greatest want, and for the rich were they convinced that this is the most valuable posses-

sion which can fall to the lot of any human being, and that, without it, their table will be their snare, and their prosperity their ruin.

It is necessary, not only to turn the ignorant from darkness to light, and to guide them in wisdom's ways, but to sanctify the researches of the scholar, to guard him from vain deceit, and to lead to that knowledge which is life eternal, and without which the man of science, notwithstanding all his acquirements, shall at the end be deemed a fool. In imparting knowledge, we should always labour that it may be accompanied with grace; for without it, there is reason to fear, that the more intelligence a man obtains, he will be the more extensively mischievous, and abuse, to foster the presumption of his own mind, or to impose on the simplicity of others, that knowledge which religion would have displayed in sobriety and benevolence.

It is necessary, not only for those who are dependent on others, that they may act with meekness and fidelity, that they may be kept from the insolence which spurns at lawful authority, and the envy which curses the more prosperous lot of others, but for those who are to occupy superior situations, that they may seek the happiness of those over whom they are placed, and rule them in the fear of God. It is when superiors and inferiors are influenced by that fear of God, and that mutual love which religion prompts, that social order is most effectually maintained, that the lower ranks feel their dependence neither irksome nor degrading, and that the higher consider their influence as a trust for which they must soon give an account, and which they ought to occupy for the benefit of all within its sphere.

The grace of God is not only necessary for the mourner to calm his heart, to wipe away his tears, to fit him for the duties of society, and to lift his eyes from the land of darkness to the regions of immortality, but to teach those who have friends to minister to each other's welfare, and to prepare for the separating hour of death. It is this which will keep friendship from the levities which degrade it, secure it from being abused for those fraudulent purposes for which the artful have too often employed its name and its courtesies, and make it the instrument of intellectual and moral improvement in all its forms of intercourse.

It is necessary for ministers, to the comfort, the fervour, and the acceptance of their labours. How irksome must the forms and the study of religion be to a carnal mind, which is enmity against God! and despicable is he in the eyes of all who inculcates duties which he never practises, and whose appearance and services are always associated with the impression of his hypocrisy. But the grace of God renders the Christian minister the father of his people, and assimilates his labours to the work of angels.

And it is needful for the people that the word preached may profit them, that they may worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, and maintain a conversation suited to the Gospel. It is the grace of God which drops on the pulpit an unction from the Holy One, and forms, in the gates of Zion, and in the dwellings of Jacob, a devout spirit and an enlightened benevolence. It is the grace of God which gives to the palace the honour that comes from on high; to the

seminary of learning the wisdom that is better than rubies; to the house of mourning the peace which passeth all understanding; and in the dungeon, a liberation from the law of sin and death.

The grace of God is needful for persons of all ages. My young friends, you may be ready to imagine that your spirits are so cheerful that you require not its exhilarating influence, that, strangers as you are to the corruption of the world, you do not need its sanctifying power, that you have not been visited with those sorrows under which its consolations are so beneficial, and that it is foolish to seek these till remorse wrings and adversity overwhelms the heart. But the voice of Jehovah hath assured us, that childhood and youth are vanity; and if you knew the evils of your own hearts, you would feel that the renovation of the Holy Ghost is absolutely necessary for you; and that, without the fruits of the Spirit, all the accomplishments which education can give are vain and empty. Cheerful as you are, your bright morning may soon be overcast, and a storm descend on you from which you know not where to look for shelter. The hilarity of your spirits, if not guided by religion, will hurry you into follies which will render you contemptible. The grace of God can alone enable you to abhor that sophistry by which the principles of many at your age have been subverted, to refuse those evil counsels by which multitudes have been led to courses which have been their ruin, and to resist those enticements by which unhallowed pleasure seduces the affections. You may labour to acquire qualifications which death may not permit you to exercise; but however short

life may be, no pious effort shall be fruitless. And think how precarious life is, and how often, as the rude blast lays the spring flowers low, death consigns the young to the grave in all the gayety of their hopes, and this will teach you to acquaint yourselves now with God.

It is needful for persons in middle life, to relieve their cares, to support them under the difficulties of their lot, and to qualify them for the respectable discharge of its duties. Without this all your labours are but sowing the wind, and all your gains are but heaping up dust. Think how powerfully the apostolic statement recommends it to you; "Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."* The utmost the world can pretend to is, that it secures the first of these, and it is one of its artifices to keep the other completely from our view; but bitter are the reflections of its votaries when dying, that they have provided for every hour but this, that the heart was overcharged with the cares of a life which is only for a moment, while on a tremendous eternity they never bestowed a thought. It is under the scorching heat of noon that a shade is most necessary, and religion will conduct you to the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, and comfort you under the unavoidable regrets and disappointments of life.

The grace of God is so needful for the aged, that without it the decline of man is bleak and barren as

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* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

the desert. It is this that sweetens reflection on the past, and brightens hope as to the future. It is the only staff on which decrepitude can lean, and it is the only prop for the failing heart. It gives a joyful sound to which the ear is never closed, and opens up prospects which make the sick heart to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. It is this alone which supports patience amidst all the infirmities of age, and gives the heart courage in parting with one world and entering upon another.

And who can die in peace and safety without the grace of God? It is this alone which can make death the object of desire, which calls ministering angels around the dying bed, which fortifies the heart for the last adieu, and which, with the dismal tokens of corruption before us, can anticipate the glories of the resurrection. Ungodly men may scoff at these statements as delusions of the imagination, but there is not one of them who can survey the last agony of a beloved relative, without wishing him such comforts and such hopes, or without desiring that they may be sent in mercy to bless his last end.

A man dying without the grace of God is a most deplorable object. He hath no hope that deserves the name, nothing which can support in death, or which can bless beyond it,—but piety can do both. The dark vale is made to it the consecrated passage from grace to glory.

The grace of God is needful in all countries. Wherever men live, they are involved in guilt and misery, and require this grace to make them holy and happy. Alas! that so many millions of human beings have

never yet heard the Gospel of the grace of God, and are still ignorant of its nature and its value, and of the way by which it may be attained!

There are many things which are deemed essential to comfort by men in civilized life, for which savage tribes feel no solicitude. The savage is as happy in his hut, or in his cave, as they are in their ceiled houses, and with the coarse food with which he supplies the wants of nature, as they are with the sumptuous fare of luxury; but the grace of God in which the pious stand is that which alone can raise him to the views, the feelîngs, and the conduct which become an immortal being.

The grace of God is not only necessary for nations never visited by the day spring from on high, but also where the Gospel is preached in all its purity. Without this, the forms of religion will be only the ceremonies of hypocrisy, and the truths of God will be held in unrighteousness. The corruption of the doctrines of the Gospel will soon take place, wherever the power of godliness decays; and it is only where grace is to be formed or cherished that Christianity will be sent or maintained.

The grace of God is necessary in countries blessed with liberty, and whose situation is secure and happy, that they may be kept from that abuse of their advantages which is always followed by desolating judgments; and in nations oppressed by the incapacity, the extravagance, and the tyranny of their rulers, or by unreasonable forms and burdensome institutions, it will diffuse a spirit which will effectually ameliorate

their condition, and establish among them righteousness and peace.

The grace of God is needful throughout all generations. In the course of ages many things once deemed essential to comfort are neglected, and many artificial wants arise. Many would feel wretched now in the want of accommodations which their ancestors would have considered as luxuries which would enervate their strength In a country emerging from a state of ignorance, confusion, and poverty, regulations may be necessary, which, when it has advanced far in knowledge, wealth, and refinement, would be ridiculous, oppressive, or impracticable. It is the office of wisdom to adapt its counsels and institutions to existing circumstances.

But there can be no state of society in which the grace of God shall not be needful.

It is the grand instrument of recalling nations from the degeneracy into which they have sunk, and without its influence the patriot's voice will warn in vain; and while commerce enriches them with her wealth, science gilds their name by its splendour, and victory extends their power by its conquests, the grace of God is necessary to guard this prosperity, and to find in it the means of true enjoyment.

In that happy state of the world which we anticipate, it will be the grace of God which will accomplish the mighty revolution; and when the people shall be all righteous, the worst miseries of earth shall disappear. There is a period approaching, when harmony and freedom, intelligence and virtue, shall

bless the nations, "when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." And shall this amazing and blissful change be effected by the devices of statesmen or the suasion of philosophy? They have never done aught to entitle them to appear as candidates for this office; and had the world been left to them, it would to this day have been filled with impurity and covered with darkness. But Christianity, in its light, power, and spirit, shall make all things new. The universe shall be its temple, saved man its trophy, and perfect holiness its consummation. The grace of God is like the sun, in whose light distant ages shall rejoice as we do, and in heaven it shall shine without a cloud, and without a setting through eternity.

2. True religion, or the grace of God influencing the heart and life, is styled by our Lord "that good part." It may be so denominated on account of the estimable qualities which are included in it. The Apostle gives a very beautiful statement of these when he says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."* These qualities are in the sight of God of great price, and his approbation is the sure test of excellence. They shed the brightest lustre over the character, and have the happiest influence over the life. Love is the elevation of the heart to God, and its expansion to every human being; joy is the rapture of the soul; and peace the calm of the affections.

* Gal. v. 22, 23.

Consider what dignity there is in long-suffering,—what beauty in gentleness,—what utility in goodness,—and what power in faith;—what confidence is secured by integrity,—what enmities are conciliated by meekness,—and what temptations are overcome by temperance. If one of those qualities is such a credit and such a blessing, what must they be united?—They form the perfection of our nature, and the whole duty of man.

True religion may also be styled the "good part," because it can make the soul happy in the absence of all the other supposed materials of felicity. In poverty it can give a greater happiness than ever was felt in riches; and in sickness a rest which was never experienced in the best days of health and vigour. It hath a testimony in slander which makes the calumnies of the world insignificant; and in bondage a peace which no fears can interrupt, and no cruelties can destroy. In solitude it brings to the heart a communion more delightful than all the joys of friendship; in separation from those we love, a confidence in their safety under the care of Heaven which no assurances from men can produce; in age, when all is fading, it drops down a reviving influence, and secures to us in death a life that shall never end. Misfortunes may sweep the good man's dwelling bare, but grace will remain; sickness may enfeeble his body, but his soul shall be in health, and prosper; in reproach it shall give to his head a crown of glory; amid the bitterest disappointments, it gratifies him with the success which gains the noblest of all objects; in public calamities it conducts him to a refuge

where he is kept in perfect peace; and when all his friends are in the grave, it presses him more closely to the bosom of the living Saviour.

In poverty there is no want which religion cannot compensate; in sickness no pang which it cannot relieve; in reproach no stain which it cannot wipe away; in bondage no chain which it cannot lighten; and in death no sting which it cannot extract. It hath a contentment which blesses poverty,—a patience which alleviates sickness,—a bright excellence which bears down slander,—a freedom from the bondage of corruption which makes the rod of oppression light;—and a faith by which death is vanquished. Who would not have taken the poverty and the sores of Lazarus, rather than the rich man's wealth, and his wickedness added to it; the chain of Paul, rather than the sceptre of Nero; and the martyrdom of the Baptist, rather than the power and splendour of the man that murdered him?

I would state, that religion alone deserves this epithet, and that nought which attempts to rival it can supply its place. Hypocrisy may in some cases obtain from men the respect which the grace of God claims, but a fair show cannot impose on the Omniscient Jehovah, and it is only for a short period that it can deceive mortals. Though the hypocrite should die unsuspected, and though his memory should be revered on earth as that of the first of saints, what doth this avail him when his soul is gathered with sinners? Confusion and horror shall cover him whom misjudging mortals have canonized, when the Great Judge

shall declare that he knows him not, and when his arrival in the abodes of misery and despair shall be greeted with this salutation by the wretched who left him shrouded in the form of godliness,—"Art thou also become weak as we are? Art thou become like unto us?"

Superstition and its ceremonies have been made substitutes for religion; but to obey is better than sacrifice: the widow's mite was a nobler donation than all the largesses of the Pharisee, and the tear of contrition a more acceptable offering than all their bleeding victims! How opposite is the course of the superstitious to that of the Author of our faith! He spent that time in substantial goodness which they occupy in senseless mummeries; blessed with his grace and truth the table of hospitality which they shun for fasting and seclusion; and left for acts of mercy rites which they regard as the essence of religion.

The external advantages of life may yield us many comforts, but nothing which can compensate us for the wants of grace. This is the pearl of great price which the wealth of the Indies cannot purchase; and this is the balm for the sorrows of the heart which no skill can compound and no art can procure. Nor can mental endowments supply its place. The wisdom which religion doth not enlighten is folly; the eloquence which it doth not animate shall terminate in speechless confusion; and the imagination which it doth not control, shall beguile the heart by its deceits, or torture it by its forebodings. Join all these faculties together, and suppose them combined in all

their power to gratify or to profit, and they can no more supply the place of the grace of God than a thousand tapers can make it day at midnight.

3. Our Lord assures us of the permanence of religion. It shall not be taken away from us. Attempts may be made to deprive us of it. Men of erroneous sentiments may endeavour to pervert our principles, and to unsettle our belief in those great doctrines and promises which form the heart to the love of God and to zeal for his glory. The gay and the dissipated may labour to entice us into folly and vice; dark dispensations may try our patience and hope; and evil spirits may in the most artful manner lure us back to perdition, but they shall not succeed; for grace hath an Almighty Protector, and he knows all the plans of its enemies to defeat them. He is able to keep us from falling, and he will confirm us to the end.

God himself will not take away the good part from us. "The gifts and callings of God are without repentance."* It cannot be supposed that he will deprive the pious of that in the exercise of which he is glorified, or that his benevolence will permit him to take from them that which is so conducive to their happiness. He is pledged by his promise to maintain and to perfect religion in the soul, and we are "confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it to the day of Jesus Christ;"† nor will he suffer them to throw it away. They can never lose their impressions of its value, and never can

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* Rom. xi. 29. † Phil. i. 6.

they feel disposed to relinquish it. "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; and I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me."* There may be some who once made a flaming profession of attachment to religion, and are now its enemies; but this proves only their hypocrisy or delusion. There are good men who have declined in religion; and there are others who are tormented with fears of the total loss of grace; but the Saviour will not quench the smoking flax, and will make these fears powerful excitements to the eager and diligent use of those means by which goodness may rise to more than its former attainments, and the heart be established in holy assurance.

It is worthy of remark, that it is of true religion alone that the assertion in the text can be made. There is no earthly advantage in whose permanence we can trust. Fame lies at the mercy of the malicious, and wealth is exposed to the arts of the crafty and to the violence of the envious; health soon withers in infirmity; the intellectual faculties sink in dotage, or are bewildered in insanity; lover and friend are put away from us, and our acquaintance into darkness; and life itself, with whatever care we cherish it, and with whatever vigilance we watch over it, endures only for a little; but the grace of God defies alike the power of malice, the waste of time, and the stroke of death; and instead of being taken from us in our last hour, shall conduct us with it to glory.

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* Jer. xxxii. 40.

II. Let us now consider the choice which we ought to make of the grace of God.

This choice implies a conviction of its value. This conviction is not that vehement but transitory impression of it which is produced by the description which charms us by its brilliance and animates us by its ardour, but which having no foundation in intelligence and principle, soon passes away into indifference. The conviction of which I speak is formed by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, which discovers to the soul the excellence of religion, and at the same time the emptiness and the insufficiency of all those objects which dispute its claim to the heart. There is in it the strongest impression, that without this grace we must be poor and miserable. Mary had peculiar advantages for this conviction in the discourses of the Saviour; but we have a record of many of the words of eternal life which he uttered, and that promise of the Spirit so encouraging to the devout inquirer, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."* He instructs with all the patience, and kindness, and power of the Saviour.

This choice implies also the renunciation of every object of esteem and confidence incompatible with it. However much these may be pursued by carnal men, —however they may be recommended as necessary to respectability and comfort,—however devoted we may have been to them in time past,—however agreeable they may be to the strongest propensities of our

* John xvi. 14.

nature, they must be abandoned for ever. In this choice there is not merely a relinquishment of the grosser pollutions of the world, but of every attachment and pursuit inconsistent with that spirituality and self-denial, that supreme affection and entire surrender of ourselves to the Redeemer, which are the essence of Christian piety. This renunciation has been made not only when these objects fade in their beauty, but when they are most fitted to captivate the carnal heart.

It implies also the devoting of the heart and of the life to its influence; and the term "choose," strongly intimates the voluntary nature of this deed. It is not the forced compliance in which a man is made by severity to profess what his heart denies, and to do that from which his soul recoils, but it is prompt and cheerful, for it is the dictate, not merely of duty, but of love. The mind is consecrated to the contemplation of its objects, and the heart to its affections, while the life is subjected to the control of all its restraints, and to the impulse of its holy tendencies and animating motives. No place in the heart is kept for sin, and no season of life allotted to folly.

I may add, that this choice lies in the diligent use of all the means of attaining it, and of improving in it. It was in this way that the preference of Mary was exhibited in this scene. Whatever may call us away from the means of grace,—whatever sacrifices must be made of time, or of worldly gain and indulgence in attending on them,—however they may be neglected entirely or occasionally by others,—and whatever misconstructions may be put on our observ-

ance of them,—we must wait at wisdom's gates, walk with the good, pray without ceasing, and meditate on God's law day and night.

This choice the Redeemer marks. Its sincerity may be suspected by others, and questioned by ourselves in an hour of despondency; but his understanding is infinite, and his conclusions are infallible. He marks it with approbation and delight. While he beholds the folly of the world with grief, and says to the men of it, "How long will ye love vanity and follow after lies?" of those who make this choice he says, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." And this complacency he intimates. How happy is that member of a family to whom he appears and says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee!" To others in the family he makes this known in the heavenly conversation which he enables his disciples to maintain, and in the holy peace with which he blesses them. Their cheerful acquiescence in disappointments under which others fret, their superiority to temptations by which others are overcome, and their devotedness to exercises in which a worldly mind is soon disgusted, strike their friends with this conviction. This complacency he intimates for the honour of those who have made the choice, and for an excitement to others. It was to lead Martha to a more entire devotedness to the exercises of piety that Christ spoke the words of the text, and while he values the blessed individual in a house that loves him, it is the wish of his heart that such was the state of all that dwell together in it, as in their

united piety their happiness would be most sweet and most safe.

CONCLUSION.

Let those who have made this choice, bless God who gave them counsel. Often call to your view the various methods by which he inclined your hearts to goodness, those events in providence, those admonitions of the pious, and those passages of his word which he blessed for teaching you true wisdom. In every act of devotion renew your choice, and let your whole conduct shew your adherence to it. Beware of every thing in your language or conduct which may render the sincerity or the wisdom of your choice questionable. If you are seen devoted to worldly pursuits, it will be said with a sneer, that you have tried religion and have found it a delusion, that you renounced the world in a fit of enthusiasm, and are now glad to return to it.

Remember that the permanence of religion requires constant watchfulness and much prayer on your part. The opposition shewn to this doctrine has in many cases arisen from the presumptuous confidence of those who maintained it,—a temper in direct opposition to the warnings of Scripture, and to the caution of the best of men. Happy is the man that feareth alway!

Labour to attain larger measures of grace. The smallest measure of it will save, but the glory of God and your own comfort are deeply interested in your progress in religion. Carnal men never think they have enough of the wealth or the honours of the world; if you say to them that they have surely a

sufficient measure of them for various purposes, they will suggest other reasons for accumulation, and when these are answered, they will devise others still; and shall not you labour to be fruitful in every good work, and to increase in the knowledge of God? When faith passes away into vision, if regret were then possible, it might be felt that it was so weak; and when your charities are honoured by the Redeemer's testimony, there will be, I had almost said, a blush of shame that they were so scanty.

Recommend the choice you have made to others, and say to them, "O, taste, and see that God is good."—Here you can speak with all the wisdom of experience, and with all the eloquence of feeling. Endeavour to convince others that religion is the principal thing, the chief good, and the best portion of man. These are not the terms of extravagance when thus applied. The grace of God deserves all your encomiums. Think how Solomon recommends it by detailing his experience of the vanity of the world, and by descanting on the excellence of wisdom. It is impossible for a pious heart to behold without regret, multitudes devoting the bright faculties with which God hath endowed them, to the trifles of a day, while objects so valuable solicit their attention in vain.

Let religious parents recommend this grace with increasing earnestness to their families. Embrace every opportunity suited to this purpose; and think not that it is only to be spoken of on solemn occasions, or at times when enlargement on its worth is

practicable; for a passing hint, a devout ackowledgment, or a good wish expressed with proper feeling, will touch the heart. If there are members of your families noted for the ardour of their desires after the grace of God, and for the diligent use of the appointed means of obtaining it, point them out to the imitation of the rest, and exhibit the part they act as the only conduct becoming in a being created after the image of God, and destined for immortality. Never permit it to be ridiculed as the pretext of indolence, the conceit of singularity, or the frenzy of enthusiasm. The spirit which dictates such sarcasms you will strongly condemn, and it will be wise to warn those whom it delights to misrepresent, to furnish it with no pretence on which it may found its cavils.

You may be able to give your families only a small pittance of this world's goods, but how happy will you be if God bestows on them this grace; and leaving them with it, you leave them with all that is essential to happiness, and safe for eternity. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield, he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."* Let the members of families, who have made this choice, be careful to exhibit religion, not in ostentatious display, idle scrupulosity, or harsh reflections, but in all the sweetness of its gentle temper, and in all the humility of its lowly mind.—What a blessing is such a child to a family! It is for her sake

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* Psalm lxxxiv. 11.

that it is watched by angels and blessed by Providence;—and what a loss is her death!—She, for whose sake guardian-angels ministered in your dwelling, with whom Christ and his Father came to it to make their abode in it, and in whom living goodness shewed the way to heaven, is gone. Ah! how seldom is the departure of such a child regretted on such grounds! May the thought strike the heart of unconverted relatives, that continuing as they are, they are parted from her for ever, and that by grace alone can they be reunited in heaven.

Finally, let those who are yet strangers to the grace of God, pray earnestly that the Holy Spirit may impress on their hearts these statements of its excellence. Unless this is the case, the next object of attraction which the world presents will efface every idea of this momentous topic. If you continue to slight the grace of God, the time is coming when you shall condemn your own folly in the bitterest pangs of remorse; when you shall see that you have spent your life in seeking vanity and lies, and shall wish, when it is too late, that you had made a wiser choice and sought a better portion.

Seek the grace of God in the use of all appointed means. You grudge not the time nor the labour necessary for acquiring the things of this world, and no diligence can be too severe, and no period too long, which are employed in seeking the righteousness which prepares for eternity, and which blesses all its duration. You have the most encouraging promises of success to animate you; "ask and ye shall receives seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened

to you."* When you consider what men will do in their reliance on the assurances of their fellow-creatures, though they know that many have been deceived and ruined by such confidence, you will surely feel that it is most reasonable that you should seek the salvation of God, trusting in those promises of success which never did nor can fail.

Let nothing discourage you in this pursuit. Your anxiety for salvation may be ridiculed, and you may hear the sentiment in the text made the subject of impious sarcasm; but wisdom is justified of her children, and shame and howling shall be the issue of a mirth offensive for its profanity and despicable for its silliness. Let not your minds be influenced by the multitudes that neglect religion. The many who were heard by the Psalmist crying, "Who will shew us any good?" only rendered him more decided in his choice and more earnest in his wish—"Lord, lift thou on me the light of thy countenance."† I have only this to add, "Now is the accepted time, and if thou art wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shall bear it."

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* Matt. vii. 7. † Psalm iv. 6.

DISCOURSE II.

PIOUS WISHES FOR FAMILIES.

2 Tim. i. 16. *The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.*

The prayers which abound in all the epistles of Paul are striking evidences of his devout and benevolent spirit. They discover not the least trace of affectation or parade, but appear to every reader the artless effusions of a mind deeply impressed with the divine presence and goodness, and eager to find, in every object which he contemplated, increase or security to the happiness of those whom he loved. It is delightful to trace this spirit in all his letters. When he illustrates a doctrine, he cannot but express his wish that the persons to whom he writes might feel its influence; when he describes a grace, that it may adorn their characters; and when he exhibits a privilege, that it may bless their lot. It is not merely in his epistles to churches, which were to be seen and heard by many individuals, that he appears thus devoted to affectionate intercession; but in his correspondence with individuals the same tendency is apparent. Piety sanctified all the intercourse of friendship, and formed all his wishes into prayers.

A beautiful example of this trait in the character of

Paul is presented to us in the text, in which a very earnest prayer is offered up for the family of a justly-valued friend. In the friendships of the world, the expression of a strong interest in any other is seldom made in any communication with a chosen friend, lest it should excite suspicions of the sincerity, strength, and permanence of the attachment professed to him; but in Christian friendship there is no malignant jealousy, and to the object of his strongest regard Paul could celebrate the worth of Onesiphorus.

Nothing can shew more strikingly the folly of superstition, and the miserable expedients to which it has recourse to give countenance to its practices, than the bringing forward of this passage by writers of the Popish church, in connexion with the last verse of the chapter, to support praying for the dead. They suppose, from the salutations which Paul addresses to this man's family in the close of the epistle, that he was dead, and that, in the passage which follows the text, he implores mercy for him, though no longer in the land of the living. But it is certain, from the text, that he had been at Rome, and that he had not as yet returned to his family. The happiness of departed saints Paul uniformly states as beyond all uncertainty or change. It is truly lamentable that a passage so rich in instruction to families should have been fixed on by controversialists for idle disputation. Let us view it for the purposes of practical wisdom, and seek for all our dwellings the mercy which it supplicates.

In this discourse I shall call your attention to the

blessing here solicited, to the language in which the request is expressed, and to the amiable spirit which the prayer breathes.

I. Let us then consider the blessing here solicited for this family. It is obvious, that the mercy here implored must be understood of the fruits and blessings of mercy, and must be viewed as including all that a Christian friend should desire for the families of his friends, and all that is necessary for them in their various circumstances. He asks protection for their dwelling from all evil. At that time, besides the troubles common to man, the dwellings of Christians were exposed to the evils of a state of persecution. They might be assaulted, pillaged, and torn down by a ferocious populace, and the lives of their inhabitants sacrificed in their rage; or they might be dragged from them to prison and to judgment. The generous boldness with which Onesiphorus had espoused the cause of the apostle made his family more obnoxious to exasperated bigots. From such evils he besought the Almighty to protect them. His own calamities would be aggravated, not lessened, by their being doomed to share them. So far from being disposed to complain that they were exempted from indignities and injuries which were heaped on him, he was solicitous that they might continue to be so. It was his wish that they might enjoy a security which had been denied to himself; and whatever he had reason to apprehend as to his own fate, it would sooth him to think that his friends were safe.

But in the most peaceful scenes and periods, fami-

lies are in danger from contagious diseases, from thieves, and from fire and tempests; and their only security is under the shadow of the Almighty.

It includes also comfort under domestic sorrow. Paul knew that to the best families afflictions must come; and it was his desire that, under these, they might experience all needful support, and that they might be overruled for promoting their best interests. The kindness which they had shewn to Paul makes it evident that this family was opulent; but mercy is necessary to sanctify prosperity as well as to support in indigence; and while he wished them the blessing of God on what they enjoyed, it was his desire that, when trouble came, it might be sustained with resignation, and yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Mercy is needed to smooth the bed of languishing, and to uphold the sympathy which watches by its side;—to bear the sick infant in the arms of unwearied kindness; to strengthen the failing heart and flesh of age; to encourage when prospects are gloomy, and to give contentment when losses are severe.

The pardon of family sins is here solicited. Into the best-regulated dwellings moral evil may come, mar their harmony, destroy their respectability, and bring down upon them the miseries of God's anger. Paul was most solicitous that this family should be kept pure from sin; and that, if any of its members should offend, they might be reclaimed and pardoned. The conversion which he himself had experienced he designates by this most expressive phrase, "I obtained mercy;" and such was the mercy he wished for those in this house who might be yet under the

power of sin, or led into it by the influence of temptation. Fear lest the members of a family may have sinned against the Lord often fills the heads of it with uneasiness. Such holy solicitude was felt by Job, and he prays more earnestly for forgiveness than for any other blessing; for he knows that without this the wrath of God shall poison every enjoyment and call down every evil.

But the apostle wished that they might enjoy every spiritual blessing; that the house might be enlivened by religious joy, and kept at all times in its holy peace; that fellowship with God might be enjoyed in it; that the graces of the Spirit might adorn all their members with their beauties; that they might be adopted into the family of heaven, and be made heirs of the eternal inheritance. These are blessings, of the value of which the carnal mind is unconscious, and which occupy no place in its wishes for the happiness of friends: nay, in the insolence and folly of prosperity it has made them the subjects of its wanton ridicule, and the house of mirth has been the scene where the only true felicity of families has been set at nought. But their worth shall be vindicated in the misery of those that despise them, and in their unavailing regrets. These are the sure mercies of man; and compared with them, worldly comforts are but broken cisterns and fleeting shadows.

I may add, that it intimates the wish of Paul that they might be reunited in happiness in the heavenly state. He knew that death must enter the house, and that, in sad succession, its inhabitants should fall by its stroke. This is the inevitable lot of every family,

however closely united in love, or brightly distinguished for piety. It is foolish to keep this out of our view, that it may not mar our present felicity; for the idea of its termination will heighten our impression of its value, and guard us from every thing by which the affliction of that period might be aggravated. It would have been vain for Paul to wish that they might never part; and he could not degrade his friendly solicitude by any thing which reason could not sanction and piety could not utter. But this is a request, that, at the last day, they might meet on the right hand of the Judge, might receive the same blissful sentence, go away to the same happy scene, and there dwell together in harmony more complete, and in happiness more perfect, than was attainable here. Here the Father of Mercies pities, but there he calls to fulness of joy: here he supports, but there he crowns.

II. Let us now consider what is intimated in the language in which the wish is expressed.

1. It shews that from God only do these blessings come. No foresight, influence, or power of their own could secure to them those advantages, neither could they be obtained for them by any human friendship. The highest rank in the state, and the most elevated office in the church, could be of no avail in securing them. Paul does not say to them as was said of old to the Shunamite, "Wilt thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the guard?" neither does he look for these blessings to the angels of God. He knew that these spirits are the guardians of the good,

and he had been often protected and encouraged by their ministrations; but in these they are the messengers of the Most High, and act only as he empowers them; neither does he look for any such blessings to the interference of any pious friends they might have already in heaven. Such blessings are not theirs to give, neither is it their province to ask them. It is to God alone he directs his request, who was "able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that they could ask or think."

2. It intimates, that with God there is abundance of mercy. It is asked, not for an individual, but for a family. Think how the earth is full of his goodness, and how the many mansions on high are filled with his glory; and are the treasures of his mercy more scanty than those of his goodness and glory? Often do the sacred writers speak of the multitude of his mercy, and of the exceeding riches of his grace. "The Lord will create on every dwelling place of Mount Sion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, and upon all the glory there shall be a defence.* As the pillar of cloud and fire in the desert was a shadow to the whole body of the Israelites from the scorching heat by day, and gladdened and protected by its blaze every tent throughout the camp during the night, so God can shelter the families of the good in every calamity, and bliss their darkest hours with comfort. What are the perils of the creatures to Omnipotence! and what are their wants to God all-suf-

* Isaiah iv. 5.

ficient! Were every dwelling on the face of the earth thus filled with mercy, the stores of his bounty would be as rich, and the benevolent inclinations of his heart as strong as ever.

3. It points out that to this mercy they had no claim. Amiable as they were in manners, and excellent in character, it was as the gift of God,—he only could ask, or they receive it. These qualities of theirs were not the result of human culture, but of divine operation; and though they had been so, they could have presented no claim to these favours, because they were the mere discharge of duty, and were mingled with imperfections which, in strict justice, demanded the rejection of the whole. It is most interesting to mark the zeal for the honours of grace which shines in Paul's elaborate illustrations of the Gospel method of salvation, manifested in his language of friendship; and how careful he was, while he expresses his high sense of their good qualities, to speak of their salvation as the fruit of mercy. His affection never betrayed him into language adapted to cherish any presumptuous hope. He wished the grace of Christ to be with them always in their view, and in its influence. The apostle had seen grace blessing the prison at Philippi, and making the jailor to rejoice with all his house; and he trusted that the grace of the Lord Jesus would be exceedingly abundant to this family in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.

4. It beautifully expresses the enlargement and liberality of Paul's benevolence. In the families of friends we feel more deeply interested in some of the members of them than in others, and are more ardent

and frequent in our good wishes for them; but the apostle solicits mercy for all,—mercy which was required by the infant as well as by those of maturer years;—mercy suited to their different wants and ailments, duties and prospects;—mercy which would not leave one under the roof in the gall of bitterness;—mercy which would form in the salvation of all a union of piety and felicity, which should make it the house of God and the gate of heaven. How different is this wish from that of David in the hour of his bitter regret for the death of Abner, when he said, "Let the blood of Abner rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house, and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread!"* In that imprecation we see vengeance called to rest on the family of Joab from generation to generation; but in the text the apostle wishes that while one remained on earth related to Onesiphorus, he might be the object of divine mercy.

III. Let us now turn our attention to the amiable spirit which this prayer breathes.

It is the prayer of gratitude. The kindness which Onesiphorus had shewn him he could not forget. He had received not one merely, but many acts of it, and it was shewn in circumstances perilous to his benefactor. A man in prison, however innocent he may be, has few friends. Such was the odium excited against the apostle, that he was considered as an enemy to the

* 2 Sam. iii. 29.

peace of society; and those that shewed him favour were regarded as of the same stamp with himself. Such was the temper of the Roman magistrates, and such was the despotic power which they exercised, that they could wreak their fury on Paul without any one daring to find fault with them; and any act of kindness to such a man they might consider as an imputation upon their justice in his incarceration. Yet, with all these things in his view, Onesiphorus often refreshed him, and was not ashamed of his chains.

Paul was the more deeply affected with the steadiness of his friendship that it was rare. In this very epistle he says, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."* Under the influence of fear, many deserted him, but he could forgive their unkindness, and pray to God to forgive it. There was one that stood by him, though he stood alone. Such kindness claimed Paul's fervent gratitude, and this address to God shewed how he felt it. He besought the Lord to recompense it, for he could not.

It is the prayer of Christian affection. The spirit which was manifested in the conduct of Onesiphorus discovered the best dispositions, and attracted the strong regard of Paul. It was not one act of beneficence which might have been produced by some temporary excitement, but a course of it which only genuine principle could have maintained. It was not made with the most distant idea of any return, but

* 2 Tim. iv. 16.

was kindness of the most disinterested description. It was an attachment so steady that no calumny could shake it,—so strong, that in the midst of the greatest perils it would be expressed,—and so constant, that no length of time could bring upon it the least decay. It was an attachment to Paul for his works' sake, and for his Master's sake. Such a spirit had so much of true excellence in it, and so much of the temper of the Gospel; it was so accordant with Paul's own feelings, and with what he wished to promote as the sweetest fruit of religion, and the best cement of the evangelical temple, that he felt his heart strongly engaged by it. He loved such a man with all his heart, and this led to the expression of his best wishes for him and his.

It is not difficult to account for the peculiarly strong affection with which the primitive Christians regarded each other. The spirit of love was poured down upon them in an abundant measure, and their circumstances were adapted to unite their hearts. Jews and Gentiles were combined to oppose and to persecute them; in the church alone did they see the look or hear the voice of kindness, and they saw that in mutual sympathy they must seek for solace in affliction, and in zealous co-operation look for the advancement of their cause.

But we must also view it as the prayer of a minister of Christ for the happiness of a family under his charge. The apostles of our Lord were commanded in their teaching from house to house, to say first, into whatsoever dwelling they entered, "Peace be to this

house."* No arrangements were made for their support while engaged in the promulgation of the Gospel; they were left to find this in the kind attentions of families in the places where they ministered; and wherever they went they found rest in some hospitable dwelling. The favours they received were much more than repaid in the instruction which they communicated. Their office brought them at once into the heart of families, and into these they went with the benevolence which became the servants of a Master in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed, and whose precepts breathe the tenderness of his own love. It was in admirable wisdom that our Lord ordered his disciples to express such wishes, as it was a memento of what should be the great object of their ministry, was adapted to make all their ministrations of that affectionate cast which should gain the confidence and attachment of the people; and would lead them to use every means in their power for that spiritual welfare of families which is a matter of such vast importance to the support and permanence of the church of Christ.

The families scattered over the heathen world had each their household gods to whom they looked for favour and protection; and the Gospel called their regard from these graven images to him, who alone is the God of all the families of the earth, who can bless them all with grace and peace, under whose shadow the loneliest habitation is safe, and the poorest

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* Luke x. 5.

dwelling is happy, and in whose worship the heart is formed to the best charities.

Paul had it not in his power to visit the dwelling of his friend, and to express in it such wishes, but he did it in his prayers, in which he daily and affectionately made mention of the churches; and when a minister is unable to perform this part of his duty, it will cheer him amidst the languor of confinement or the gloom of absence thus to intercede for them, and to have his heart with them.

CONCLUSION.

Let the example of Onesiphorus be copied by us all. Let us do good to all, as we have opportunity, especially to those that are of the household of faith. How animating are the words of our Lord! "He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, He shall in no wise lose his reward."* When any good man is suffering reproach or oppression for the sake of his religion, he has a peculiar claim to attention and sympathy. Such acts of persecution as these to which Paul was subjected are happily unknown in this age and country, yet some have been treated harshly for the Gospel's sake. Their circumspection is ridiculed as weak scrupulosity,—

* Matt. x. 41—42.

their aversion from worldly follies as sullen austerity,—and their exertions to do good as ostentatious display. Some, too, on account of their zeal for the Gospel, have been dismissed from situations and employments, in which their families were comfortable; and some, for their fidelity in reproving vice, have found that censure, though uttered with the best intentions of reforming the wicked, excites the bitterest enmity of the proud and carnal heart. Now, to persons thus suffering for righteousness' sake, let us shew oursèlves friendly. We shall disgrace ourselves by neglect or contempt of them; but to suffer with them is to share the reproach of the cross of Christ.

But whatever be the sorrows of our brethren, let us be willing to share them. We may judge from the following language of Job of the beneficence of his life; and it inculcates compassion and kindness more powerfully than any precept he could have delivered. "If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof;—for from my youth he was brought up with me as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;—if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering, then let mine arm fall from my shoulderblade, and mine arm be broken from the bone."*—Let the Spirit of Paul, as displayed in this prayer, be imbibed. Let none say, I have not received such kindnesses as he experienced. But are there none of whose hospitality you

* Job xxxi. 16—22.

have partaken?—Are there none who have supported you when you were defamed and ready to be borne down? Are there none who have adhered to you when you were forsaken by others,—who visited you and ministered to you when you were in the dark and cheerless mansion of affliction?—These questions will engage you in recollections which may benefit the heart. It is probable that some who have shewed you kindness are now in their graves, but they have relations to whom your requital may be made; and I know not a more powerful mode of teaching them the lessons of mercy, than such a return for a father's patronage or a mother's sympathy. If your benefactors are in the land of the living, shew your gratitude for their kindness by performing such good offices to them when they require them, and by doing more for them, if it is in your power, than what they did for you. If you have nothing in your power, you can put up for them the prayer in the text. God can reward the kindness which his children cannot. What a beautiful view of Providence is this! and let it encourage the heart which is sighing at the thought that it can make no return for the favours of the good. God can recompense them with better blessings, and in a fitter season, than thou couldest, though heaps of gold were thine. It is his delight to fulfil the desires of the willing mind. Whatever requital you make them, prayer should accompany it. Without the divine blessing the gifts of gratitude are empty. With that blessing wishes shall carry happiness with them.

Let ministers cherish such wishes for the families

of their people; and where they are sincere, they will lead them to visit them in their pastoral capacity, and to labour to form them to piety and love. If this is not done, their wishes are like the empty phrases of worldly compliment. Let them, when they engage in this service, call to remembrance this prayer, and discharge the duties of that ordinance in its spirit.—The house of prosperity and cheerfulness needs this mercy as well as that of sickness and mourning. Let this be your determination, that you will quit no dwelling without giving reason for the recollection of some feature of your Master's character,—without the expression of some pious wish which may shew them how much your heart is set on their salvation,—and without leaving behind you a sweet savour of Christ.

And should not such an amiable example of gratitude remind us of our greatest benefactor and of what we owe to him? Let us think of his care of our helpless infancy,—of the liberality with which he hath supplied our wants,—of the comfort with which he hath soothed our sorrows, and the price by which he hath redeemed us from all evil; and to this Benefactor we can address the request that he would bless those who are dear to us. He takes pleasure in them that hope in his mercy. Let us shew our gratitude to him by our desires and prayers that his name may be magnified in every age and in every land.

Let every head of a family put up this prayer for his own house. If you feel the need of mercy to your dwellings, it will be asked in the regular supplications of domestic worship; and you will use every appointed method for forming your children to the tem-

per and dispositions which become the receivers and the expectants of grace. Offering this prayer will have the happy influence of keeping all harshness from your language, and cruelty from your conduct; and will lead you to put on bowels of mercies, and to do what you can to render your domestics happy.

Let the members of families put up this prayer.—God hath blessed many a house in answer to the intercession of one child or of one servant in it; and this prayer will repress all tendency to insolence and acrimony in spirit and language, and render your whole demeanour mild and obliging.

Let us all put up this prayer for the dwellings of our neighbours; and whether we visit them or not, let us seek their good. No unkindness or neglect which we meet with in them should ever provoke us to leave them with an evil wish in our lips or hearts. Families would have more comfort in neighbours were they more occupied in praying for one another. Prayer will direct to them all those good offices which will make them eager to serve us.

When the young are settling in habitations of their own, let their friends pray that God may satisfy them early with his mercy; and while giving frequent entertainments would be in them peculiarly unwise, let them not withhold good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the power of their hand to do it. And let us all be solicitous to have a place in that edifice of mercy, which shall be built up for ever in blessings without number and without end. Lord, let thy mercy ever be on us, and our hope in thee. Amen.

DISCOURSE III.

DOMESTIC CARE.

1 Tim. v. 8. *If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

Christianity is distinguished by its precepts of charity. They inculcate a beneficence active, liberal, and disinterested. By their kind attentions to each other, and by their unwearied efforts to relieve the distressed, Christians were to condemn the selfish indifference and cruel oppression of the heathen, and to shew that their religion as far excelled theirs in its influence on the social virtues and felicity of a present life as in its prospects of a future existence beyond the grave. It was thus ordained by our Lord, that in his church one of his own blessed characters should be realized, and that in the consolation and mercy which it should spread around, Zion should be "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

But the wisdom of the author of our faith is conspicuous in these precepts of charity as well as his compassion. He was aware how these might be abused by the selfish, the vain, and the indolent; that some, in order to gratify more fully their own base appetites, would cast on the charity of the church the relatives whom they were bound to support, and would thus lead the opponents of the Gospel to condemn it, as destroying the most powerful incentives

to industry, and impeding the sweetest movements of the kind affections. He therefore directed his apostles to prescribe various regulations in order to guard against a conduct so base in itself, so injurious to the credit of the Gospel, and so opposite to all that nature and Christianity require. "If any widow," saith St Paul, "have children or nephews, let them first learn to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for this is good and acceptable before God."* And in the words of the text we are told, that those who neglect their poor relations, and do not exert themselves to make that provision for their own families which they ought, whatever professions they may make, have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels.

In the following discourse I shall speak of the provision which a man is bound to make for his own, and enforce this duty by the arguments which the apostle suggests.

I. Let us then consider the duty here inculcated:—

1. I observe, that the persons for whose temporal comfort we ought to provide, are the various relations committed by Providence to our care. If we have parents who are disabled by infirmity from earning a subsistence for themselves, it is our duty to make the decline of life as comfortable to them as possible. No man who has the least spark of virtuous feeling in his heart, can bear the thought, that the father who toiled for him should suffer hunger, or that the mother

* 1 Tim. v. 4.

who cherished him should pine away in neglected poverty.

If we have brothers or sisters, who, by affliction of body or of mind, are destitute and helpless, we must do whatever is in our power to place them in situations where their wants will be supplied, and their ailments treated with suitable care.

The wife and the children whom God hath given you have peculiar claims on the exertions of a husband and a father. While the wife is occupied with domestic toils, she must be furnished with the money that is necessary for the support of the family; and the children must have such food, clothing, education, and establishment in life, as are suited to their station.

These relations have the chief claim on you; but there are others more remotely allied to you, whom you must not overlook. Nature, indeed, may not plead for them so powerfully as she does for others, but to what she says, though with a still small voice, it becomes us to listen. It is truly delightful to see the aged aunt or grandmother treated with a tenderness and respect which makes them sink gently into their graves, with the blessings of gratitude on their lips, and the peace of contentment in their hearts; and those by whose care they are thus supported will feel a satisfaction in their comfort, which will more than repay them for all the attentions which it requires.

2. This provision must be as ample as our situation and ability will admit. It is not merely on what we possess that they have a claim; but, if our labour of body or mind can be carried further, consistently with the health of both, it is our duty to make this exertion

to increase their comfort. How despicable is the man who thinks he does his duty to his relations when he gives them what can only support a bare existence! He would murmur at the providence of God, if its supplies went no further than this, and yet he can act in this manner to those to whom he is bound to be merciful, as God is merciful to him.—How odious is the man who can fare sumptuously every day, and stretch himself on the softest down, while some of his relations are living on food coarse and scanty, and find the restlessness of age aggravated by a bed of chaff or straw! Nor does he act a part less hateful, who is piling up wealth in his stores, while his relations are oppressed with anxiety, and stretch out their hands in vain for relief. Let it not be said in excuse, that they are contented with their little, and that they never complain. This modesty and patience strengthen their claims to your kind attention, and nature and charity will plead their cause within you, if you will listen to their voice.

It must be admitted, that the profuse supply of the wants of the young may have a pernicious result, and that this may render them insolent, luxurious, and hard-hearted; but let us not run to the opposite extreme, lest we drive them to those mean and pilfering habits, which will be a disgrace to us as well as to them. The scanty provision of a penurious father has driven children to sneaking solicitation at the board of others, or to take money by force or fraud from their parents or friends. There are husbands, whose allowances to their partners are so inadequate to what their situation and duties require, that they are forced to

make exertions for the respectability of their own appearance, and that of their family, under which their strength sinks; or, from their degrading inferiority to others, they are subjected to the scorn of them that are at ease, and to the contempt of the proud.

3. This provision must be regular and constant. It is not by an occasional donation that we can fulfil their claims, but our care must correspond to their necessities. If we merely shew kindness to them when any particular occurrence has melted our hearts, we prove that we act from humour and caprice, and not from enlightened and steady principle. Where any depend on us only in part, we must be willing promptly to bear our full share; and where the dependence of relatives on us is total and constant, we must cheerfully bear what God has allotted to us, without availing ourselves of any excuse which may be suggested for relinquishing our care.

Let it not be said by any, that the bad temper of their relatives disgusts them, and that your patience is so exhausted by it, that you cannot trouble yourselves about them any more. But have you forgotten for how long a period your parents provided for you, and how they bore the petulance of childish passion and folly?—Your peevish cries did not provoke your mother to cast you from her bosom, nor did your idle freaks induce your father to give you up to wander in your own counsels.

Let not any urge, that their helpless relatives have behaved so ill, that they must now abandon them. Think what would be your fate, if God should do to you as you are proposing to do to them. Has not he

far stronger grounds for such a procedure ?—Often has he loaded you with benefits while the heart was swelling with pride, struggling in rebellious opposition to his sovereign will, and utterly insensible of his goodness. I wish you also to consider, that abandonment may drive them to excesses more vile ; and this is the horrid reflection which some have made over the fate of those whom self-murder or public justice have brought to an untimely end,—" Perhaps my severity put the fatal knife into his hand, and my turning them from my gate, drove them into the path of the destroyer."

There have been some who were once attentive to the comfort of their families and friends, who have been seduced into connexions and habits which have led them to neglect them ; nay, to involve them in ruin. There are men who lavish on the instruments of their guilty pleasures, the earnings by which their wives and children should be supported ; or who, in gaming and drinking, squander what should have kept them from hunger and rags. And such is the deceitfulness of the heart, and such the colour which the vicious spread over their excesses, that such men will pique themselves on their good-humour, their social qualities, and their manly freedom from sordid prejudices, while they are acting a part the most selfish, iniquitous, and inhuman.

It ought to be remembered, that to intermit our kindness and care makes neglect and misery doubly painful. They who never knew what it was to be gladdened by the smile, or cherished by the care, of kind relatives, cannot feel amidst ill-usage the pangs

which wring the hearts of those who reflect, that disgust and wrath now scowl on the face that once beamed with love, and that any thing is now thought good enough for them, by those who once would have delighted to have laid the best comforts of the world at their feet. Constancy in our duty is the only certain evidence of uprightness. The stream which is quickly dried up proceeds from a feeble spring; and the thirsty, when they look on the stones, or the sand of its channel, reflect with bitter sorrow, that here the parched and the faint shall seek refreshment in vain.

4. Attention to the spiritual necessities of our relations is certainly included under this duty. It is incumbent on the heads of families to reflect, that while the temporal circumstances of their children are comfortable, they are, in a spiritual sense, ignorant, guilty, and depraved; to impress them with the conviction that this is the case, and to guide them to him, who can alone enlighten, sanctify, and bless them. If it is the delight of a parent to see on a child's countenance the bloom of health and beauty; in his manners, the graces of prudence and gentleness; and in his ripening talents the promise of literary renown, it must be much more satisfactory to behold in their characters the beauties of holiness, the image of Christ, and the first fruits of heaven. He must furnish them with counsels to guide them through the perplexities of life, and with arguments against yielding to the corrupting influence of error and vice, —must warn them to prepare for eternity—teach them to seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and

excite them to improve the time in every species of moral activity.

With regard to other relatives, we must count their spiritual comfort of far more importance than their temporal. While we place the pillow beneath the head of the aged, let us dry up the tear on their cheek by the soothing consolations of the promises of religion; and while we set before them the meat that perisheth, and lift to their lips the cordials which they require in their infirmity, let us ask for them the water of life, and let us lead them to Him who giveth power to the faint. While we minister to their sick and broken bodies, let us try to cheer the languid, and to heal the wounded heart.

This sad reflection has sometimes afflicted the heart. I have done what I could to make my friends comfortable for a day, but nothing to make them happy through eternity. Their bodies may bless me, for I have warmed them by the fleece of my sheep, and refreshed them with the dainties of my table; but their souls shall curse me, for I have neglected them, and their religious anxieties I have laughed to scorn. On the other hand, it is a most interesting spectacle to others, and it yields unfailing gratification to the heart, when a child smooths the passage of aged friends to heaven, and rewards their care of his helplessness, by comforting the feeble mind.

I proceed now, in the second place, to enforce this duty by the arguments which are suggested in this passage.

1. They are your own. They are your own by ties

which the God of nature has formed, and the force of which every virtuous heart delights to feel. Their comfort and welfare should be dear to you as your own. The connexion between you and them is not like a junction for the purposes of interest or convenience, and which may be dissolved at pleasure; nor is it like the associations of friendship, which may be succeeded by indifference and alienation; but it is a union whose bonds cannot be relaxed, and whose duties can only be fulfilled in the exercise of kind affection and watchful care. By all that is tender in a parent's claim—by all that was delightful in the feelings with which you pressed the child of your hopes to your bosom; and by the vow which you made at the moment when the hand of your partner was given you in solemn pledge before God, that her heart was yours—you are urged to exert yourselves for their welfare to the utmost of your power. Your cares you lavish not on strangers, but on those who are bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. There are times when this claim is powerfully felt. In the hour of separation, when the grave says "They are mine," the heart is almost broken by the stroke that parts us; and in the hour of our own departure, with whom do we wish our ashes to mingle? It is our desire to be gathered to our fathers—to sleep in the grave beside them, and to have our dust and theirs made one. Now it will be impossible for us to indulge such a wish without remorse or shame, if we are inattentive to their comfort while they are with us.

2. Those who provide not for their own have denied the faith. They deny it in conduct, and this is a

denial of all others the most pernicious and offensive. Its plainest and most solemn precepts they disregard. "Honour thy father and thy mother.—And ye, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies; he that loveth his wife loveth himself, for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." "The glory of children are their fathers."* These are the direct statements of duty in Scripture; and while they are set at nought, men have no title to be credited in their professions of regard to other portions of it. True faith shews itself by receiving all that God reveals, as genuine virtue is manifested in obeying all that God enjoins.

How affecting also is the pattern which the Author of our faith hath set us of this duty! He could have supplied the wants of his mother by a miracle, but he chose to work as a carpenter for her support, to animate the efforts of filial piety, and to shew us with what indignation and abhorrence he will regard those who leave aged relatives to want and beggary. Let us think of his conduct when he was dying. In this most arduous and agonizing struggle, he exhibited the noblest specimen of filial tenderness; and shewed that the kind sympathies of nature accord with the noblest magnanimity, and the most entire devotedness to the will of God, and to the general happiness of mankind. While forsaken by his Father and his God, his heart

* Eph. v. 28, 29; vi. 2, 4. Prov. xvii. 6

sought out relief to the forlorn state of Mary. It is thus that the cross of our Lord is connected with domestic life; and that its sorrows and its joys are sanctified by contemplating the heart of the suffering Redeemer, alive to its fondest and earliest recollections, influenced by its tenderest solicitude, and devoting some of his last cares to the comfort of one who lived but for him. Now, no man who disregards the laws, and the pattern of the Author of our religion, can be its friend. He may speak in praise of it with fervour, but Christianity disowns him; his kiss of treachery, and his words of flattery, shall be considered as aggravating his baseness, and he shall at last be led forth among the enemies whom the Lord will consume.

3. Those who provide not for their own are worse than heathens. Many of the heathen have been celebrated for the efforts which they made for the comfort of their parents; and surely those who had no monitor but nature, will rise up in judgment and condemn those who, knowing and professing a religion of love, were unkind and unfaithful in the relations of life. Such persons degrade themselves below the brute creatures. You see with what care "the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," and with what boldness she will fight in their defence; you see with what art and labour the birds prepare their nests for their young, and with what unwearied kindness they supply them with food. Even those animals which are deemed the most fierce and voracious, reprove the selfish and merciless wretches to whom our text alludes. The bear, bereaved of her whelps, rages with the most horrible fury in her search after them.

Even the sea-monsters draw out the breast and give suck to their young; the eagle stirreth up her nest, —fluttereth over her young,—spreadeth abroad her wings,—takes them and bears them on her wings; and yet men, to whom reason, conscience, and revelation speak as well as nature, are often careless and sometimes cruel to their own. At such scenes we may well blush for human nature.

Persons who are inattentive to their relatives have sometimes made pretension to the acutest sensibility, been distinguished for donations of ostentatious bounty, and have professed to enter warmly into the support of schemes characterized by general philanthropy; they have flattered themselves with the hope, that they should be celebrated as men of superior benevolence; but their behaviour to their own shews that they are destitute of the first principles of charity, and that if it were not for the love of applause, they would be as unkind abroad as at home.

4. Such as provide not for their own are worse enemies to the Gospel than the most inveterate and crafty infidels. The most forcible weapons with which the Gospel has been attacked, have been those which have been drawn from the misconduct of its professors. Here is the poison in which the infidel dips his arrow; and when it pierces not deep, its very touch inflames. Consider how the conduct which the apostle reprobates in the text is employed against the Gospel. Its enemies exclaim, you expatiate on its happy influence in strengthening and sweetening the charities of domestic life; but we know persons who are most punctual in attending its ordinances,

vehement in protestations of attachment to godliness, and furious in their invectives against all its opponents; austerity dwells on their countenance, and preciseness marks their steps, yet their aged parents are pensioners on the bounty of the public, and unfortunate relatives are never permitted to enter their gates; and doth not this prove that the affections of the heart are repressed and chilled by Christianity;—that it is not a religion adapted for the happiness of families, but for the gloom and the ceremonies of the cloister; and that its perfection is to be seen in the rigid ascetic and the ferocious enthusiast? To such men it is easy to reply, that Christianity must be judged by the spirit of its laws and the character of its Author; that we pity their delusion, and complain of their want of candour; but with regard to those whose conduct gives rise to such reflections, we must call on them instantly to imbibe its temper, or to renounce a profession which they dishonour.

Where Christians are seen active and affectionate in the duties of domestic life, the Gospel is honoured as the source of family comfort and love, and multitudes are allured to place their tents under its shadow. No defence of the Gospel, however argumentative and elaborate, will work upon the heart like this. Let it never be forgotten, that the unkind and unfaithful relative is the most dangerous infidel and the worst man.

CONCLUSION.

Let heads of families often reflect on these motives to their duty; and to these let them add the happy influence which this will have on their own prosperity

by securing them the blessing which maketh rich, and with which God adds no sorrow. Think also of the blessings this will bring down upon you from the aged relatives to whose comfort you minister, and of the feelings of delight with which you will reflect on this prayer which you heard them putting up when their hearts were melting at the thoughts of your kindness, "O God of my salvation, befriend and save the child who has been the shelter of my grey hairs, and the nurse of my decline." Thus you will have reason to expect similar treatment from your children when you grow old. Often has it been seen, that children who were insolent and unkind to their parents, have been punished by the rudeness and the rebellion of their offspring; while the filial piety of youth is repaid by the reverence and love of the rising race treading in its steps.

While your own thus receive from you the care which is their due, as you have opportunity do good to all around you, especially to them that are of the household of faith. They are yours by the ties of grace, and ye are all one in Christ Jesus. There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. The tear of sympathy blesses the heart from which it issues, and the alms of charity increase the store from which they are taken.

Let me call on those for whom others provide, to bless God who, in mercy to their forlorn and helpless state, hath opened for them a refuge in the kindness of relatives. The attentions which you experience are enjoined by his law, and prompted by his spirit.

Be more ready to acknowledge the kindness which you receive, than to complain of neglect. Endeavour to be as useful as possible to those who minister to you. Let aged Christians impart the counsels of experience, and the consolations which gladden their hearts, to those who provide for them, and let them be given with that kindliness of manner which you feel so amiable in their good offices.

Let children, by their modesty, their reverence, their docility, and their improvement, make their parents glad. They will feel that their culture has not been bestowed on an unfruitful soil. And let wives manage with neatness and frugality what their husbands provide. Let it be their care to make their dwelling so comfortable that they will feel no place so delightful; let them open their mouths with wisdom and kindness, and labour to do them good and not evil all the days of their life.

Fret not that you are thus obliged to be dependent on others. It is indeed more blessed to give than to receive; but to share the pledges of affection influenced by religious principle,—to occupy a part in their devout wishes, and in their hopes of everlasting felicity is undoubtedly a high privilege. And imagine not that you are cumberers of the ground. In old age you shall still bring forth fruit to repay the cares of your friends. Whatever you can do for yourselves ought still to be done. By your counsels you may guide your friends to measures which may prove advantageous; and by your prayers you may obtain for them blessings infinitely better than what they bestow on you.

Let those who may have no relatives cast on their care reflect, that no Christian liveth to himself. There are many around you who need your kindness. The aged whom infirmity and want unite in enfeebling; the orphan bereft for ever of a father's care and of a mother's kindness; the prisoners whose strength is wasting under the rigours of confinement; the relations of the captive to whom separation from a husband or a parent is embittered by indigence and anxiety, by fear, and by the hope deferred which maketh the heart sick, have very strong claims on your beneficence. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight, for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."* In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand. The plants you now sow may continue to yield fruit when your body is consuming in the grave. In the institutions of charity which they founded or patronised; in the virtuous whom they formed to a life of goodness; and in the prayers which are answered at the set time, the saints live on the earth long after they have seen corruption, and they live in heaven. God is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love; and blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Let the good live in the faith, that for them the Lord will provide a competence on earth, and an eternal inheritance in heaven. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

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* Eccl. xi. 2. 6.

DISCOURSE IV.

FAMILY WORSHIP.

PSALM XCII. 1, 2. *It is a good thing to shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.*

THIS Psalm was composed for the worship of the Sabbath; and the admiration of the works of God, the confidence in the rectitude of his administration, the ardour in devotion, and the zeal for progressive excellence which it displays, render it peculiarly suited for meditation and for use on that day. It may be employed with great advantage on other occasions. The words of our text assert the advantages of devotional exercises in general; but I propose, in this discourse, to consider them as referring in a peculiar manner to the worship of families.

It is not my intention to prove the reasonableness of this practice, or to set before you those evidences from Scripture which shew it to be a part of the holy exercise of every pious man. There is no one who is capable of forming an opinion on any topic, or whose sentiments are entitled to the smallest attention, who can question the reasonableness of this service; nor can any one peruse the Bible without beholding good men building an altar to the Lord wherever they pitched their tents, and families in which the voice of social worship is never heard, marked out as the ob-

jects of Jehovah's curse. But instead of fixing your eye on the cloud which rests on the dwellings of the wicked, I wish to allure you to this duty by stating, in various points of view, its happy results, and by exhibiting a pious family as abiding in the tabernacle of Jehovah, and blessed by the united influence of kind affections and habitual devotion.

In the following discourse I shall first call your attention to the advantages of family worship, and then to that mode of performing it which seems best adapted to secure them.

I. Let us then consider the advantages of family worship, which are both numerous and important.

1. Providence smiles on the families where God is worshipped. Jehovah loves the dwellings of Jacob, and blesses the habitations of the just. These are the direct statements of Scripture, and it is vain for the enemies of religion to point out to us religious families oppressed with poverty, and to ask, what marks of Divine favour can be seen in these naked hovels, in that severe toil which is required when this ceremony is ended, and in that bed of chaff and straw on which they must lie down to recover their exhausted strength? To this we reply, that they know little of human nature who suppose that happiness is dependent on external circumstances, and that they are grossly ignorant of the ways of God who imagine that riches are the pledges of his love. As to the poor man, you see the sweat of his brow, but you discern not the contented and pleasing reflections of his heart; you see the scantiness of his fare, but not

the blessing which is in it. In these humble dwellings Jehovah bides as a friend, and on these beds he gives the sleep of his beloved.

The favour of Providence to the families of the pious may be seen in the vigour and ability with which the husband pursues his labour; in the vigilant and cheerful economy of the wife; in the health that blooms on the faces of the children; in those habits of order, wisdom, and industry to which they are formed by the lessons and rites of religion; in the respect and aid which such a family receive from their neighbours; and in the success which crowns their prudent plans and cautious measures for improving their circumstances. "On family worship," said a good old man, "I look back with peculiar gratitude as one grand means of my uncommon measure of domestic comfort, and of bringing down on my children the blessings which God has so graciously bestowed on them."

2. Religion and virtue will flourish in a family where Divine worship is duly observed. No man will dispute its tendency to check practices inimical to these. He who in the morning implores God's blessing on his labours for his family, will not indulge the drowsiness which must clothe them with rags. He who shews forth God's lovingkindness in the morning, will not make his family unhappy by the murmurs of envy; nor will he who declares Jehovah's faithfulness every night shake their trust in God by dark forebodings or unbelieving fears. He who worships God in his dwelling morning and evening will not be mingled with bands of depredators; nor will his eye wait for the twilight that he may repair to the

haunts of lewdness. This is not the man whom you dread to see reeling home to his dwelling in a state of intoxication; nor is it from the lips which prayer hallows that corrupt communication or blasphemous talk will proceed.

The wife who has joined with her husband in family devotion, will be desirous to shew that her solicitude for the comfort of her dwelling is equal to his. Viewing the good things of her lot as the gifts of Providence in answer to prayer, she will take care that they be not wasted in riotous living or in vain show. It will keep her from those corrupting amusements where virtuous principle is enfeebled and lulled asleep, and that wandering from house to house which encourages indolence and tattling, and excite her to devote all her spare time to cultivate those acquirements which become the companion of a wise and devout man. It is not in a praying family that children will be ruined by impious talk, or by profligate behaviour, but it is here that they will find the best counsels enforced by a suitable practice. They will feel a strong desire to know the God to whom this regular homage is paid, and they will be impressed with their dependence on him, and with a desire to serve him like their fathers. If it is managed in a proper manner, instead of grudging that they must desist from their amusements, or be kept from their beds till it is over, they will feel a pleasure in singing the songs of Zion, and in lifting up their hands in God's name. It is impossible that parents can pray for children, and not feel it to be their duty to watch over them, and to teach them to fear God.

The great objects and sanctions of religion cannot be seriously contemplated without feeling the heart impressed by them; and as the divine influence is communicated in the ordinances of his grace, we have reason to expect that God will sanctify us by his truth, and cherish in us the power of godliness, while we conscientiously observe its forms.

Family worship cherishes gratitude, by that review of mercies which is requisite in order to our singing praises with understanding,—and dependence on God by its supplications; while the portions of the Bible which are read enlighten the mind and purify the heart. The heart which religious fervour warms in the morning will glow with pious feeling through the day; and the imagination sanctified by evening prayer will mark the slumbers with visions of purity and peace.

3. It is excellently calculated to promote harmony and affection in families. Without these there can be no happiness. A family seated round a table loaded with the most sumptuous fare will have little enjoyment, if the repast is conducted in the sullen silence of jealousy and scorn; or if the parties assembled speak the language of ridicule and abuse. Far superior to such a scene is the homely board which is blessed by the smile of affection and by the language of kindness.

Now such a desirable state will be effectually promoted by religious worship. Engaged frequently in adoring their common Lord and Father, and in contemplating and praising the divine goodness, rudeness and ill nature will be abhorred, and the feelings of

benignity and the purposes of kindness cherished. In tracing the mild manners and patient spirit of our Lord, a strong determination must be formed to conquer the irritability of our temper, and to subdue the violence of our passions. Prayer for children increases a parent's eagerness for their welfare; and the young feel their hearts knit to a father and a mother while they listen to their earnest prayers for their happiness.

Uniting in the same song and in the same requests promotes a cordial agreement in the pursuit of their temporal interests. The confession of sin promotes forbearance, and a disposition to judge with candour of each other's actions; and the exercise of the graces of devotion represses those anxieties about worldly things which render carnal men so irritable. The members of families rise from their knees more inclined to seek each other's good, and more determined to keep the unity of nature and the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

4. This practice is well calculated to promote the consolation of families. Various are the afflictions which befall us in life, and which render our dwellings houses of mourning; yet, however different these may be, devotion opens to us a refuge in them all. If sickness stretches any in a family on the bed of languishing, the sweet melody of psalms is grateful to his ear and soothing to his heart; while his attempting to join in it with a feeble and faltering voice stirs up all that are by his side to worship the Lord with their whole soul. The Spirit of power and love comes down at such seasons, uncommon interest is felt in this exercise, and the psalms sung and the chapters read at such periods are never forgotten

When some of the members of a praying family go to a distant land, and are there placed in a society where they see much to disgust them, the heart is soothed by the thought, " The dear circle at home is addressing the throne of grace, and we are not forgotten ;" while the pangs and anxieties of absence are alleviated in those that remain by thus making mention of them in their prayers, and commending them to Him whose care can extend as far as their wishes.

When any of the members of a family act an unworthy part, their joint supplications for his pardon, and for the prodigal's return, will cherish abhorrence of his sin, and that cheering hope of his repentance which mitigates the pangs of shame. The religious exercise of a father and a mother on such occasions will be to the rest a most powerful preservative from misconduct, and an animating motive to excel in wisdom and virtue.

Should a praying family be in danger from violent men, they will feel in the psalm of devotion that God is their shield and glory ; and in blessing them that curse you, and in praying for them that despitefully use you, the uneasy feelings of anger will be extinguished ; and the expressions of your Christian meekness and charity, cherished in the memories of children, may guard them from ruining themselves by yielding to the impulse of revenge. And if any one in the family is removed by death, when his voice is no longer heard in this exercise, it is most soothing to reflect, that past prayers may have been answered in his salvation, and that, with the family of heaven, he is now singing the song of the Lamb. How sooth-

ing is the reflection, that to these closed ears the voice of devotion was ever sweet, and that the heart, now cold and motionless, was glad at the call, "O come, and let us worship, and fall down before the Lord our Maker!" The burst of lamentation will be hushed by such meditations, and the gloom of nature dispelled by the influence of religious hope.

5. Let us attend to the beneficial consequences which will result from this practice to the church and to civil society. The children who are trained up where this ordinance is observed are most likely to be good members of both. Children are often placed in situations remote from the dwellings of their parents; and by carrying there the spirit and the practice of religion, may form to the knowledge, the love, and the virtues of the gospel, those who were before sunk in ignorance, and enslaved to their lusts.

They who have been accustomed to family worship are not likely to become the despisers of public; nor are they whose hearts were formed by it to all the charities of the gospel likely to become the troublers of churches. They who were taught to honour their parents, and who followed them in their devotions as their guides in the Lord, are not the persons who will be disposed to treat their pastors with disrespect. It is not probable that those who have been thus trained will scandalize the church by their gross immoralities; for it is not a mind imbued with devotion that the song of the drunkard will enchant, or the flatteries of the harlot ensnare.

Servants who have come into praying families thoughtless and ignorant, may go away from them

enlightened and serious; and knowing that they must be present at this exercise, they will be kept from going out at such periods to improper and dangerous associates.

If religion be admitted to be of consequence to the welfare of society, the utility of family worship is great indeed. It is not in such a family that the spirit of insubordination can work, nor does the fool issue from it to incite to tumult and mischief. The spirit which religious worship cherishes is meek and humble; it teaches us to behold the superior advantages of others with complacency, and to consider the situation in which we are placed as the appointment of a wisdom which knows what is best for us. The crimes which fill society with horror are committed for the most part by those to whom impiety and vice were the first lessons.

The prayers which are put up in pious families for the church and for the land are fitted to cherish in all who join in them that affection to both which will lead us to seek their good. It would be easy to shew that the prayers of such families for the afflicted are adapted to cherish in the young a charitable and sympathizing spirit; and it is not in such dwellings that the misfortunes of others will be made the object of bitter reproach or of barbarous exultation.

II. I proceed now to suggest some directions as to the proper mode of conducting this service.

1. Several things must be attended to before we engage in it. Let us endeavour, by previous reflection, to bring our minds into a suitable frame. If we

engage in it while our minds are distracted by cares, or dissipated by folly, there can be no spirituality nor comfort in the service. We must call up to our view those solemn truths which will make us stand in awe. Let us consider the situation of our families, that we may present suitable confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings. Let us reflect likewise on the psalm which is to be sung, and on the part of the word which is to be read, that we may express their proper influence in prayer.

Let us labour to attain fluency and variety. There are some who have a quicker conception and a greater facility of expression than others; but every man whose heart and soul are set to seek the Lord his God will improve in his manner of performing this duty. The Spirit is promised to help our infirmities, but this aid can only be expected in the use of appointed means; and the rhapsodies of folly are more injurious to religion than the dull repetition of the same forms.

Let heads of families take care that all connected with them be present. If children are indulged in occasional absence, they will soon withdraw from it entirely. Let not anxiety to profit by the labours of your servants induce you to keep them at work while you and your children pray; for they will labour with more conscientious earnestness for a master to whom their souls are precious. If you refuse to allow them a pause for devotion, they will take it for indolence, or amusement, or mischief, when your eye is not on them.

2. There are several directions which may be suggested with regard to the performance of the duty. All the parts of it must be observed. Some think it

enough to pray, and others satisfy themselves with singing of psalms and the reading of the word. But it is by the union of all the three that we discharge the duty, and fulfil the ends of family worship. There are times when it may be inexpedient or impracticable to do more than pray; but such seasons occur rarely, an opportunity for worship is much less wanted than a willing mind.

Let it be performed with seriousness and fervour. It is the character of a good man that he trembles at God's word. Jehovah must be sanctified by all that draw nigh to him. Our tones of voice and modes of expression must be grave and solemn; but let us remember, that if the heart is not influenced by godly fear, we are acting the part of hypocrites; and that the detection of this will degrade us in the estimation of our families, when they find our fervour affectation, and our solemnity mere grimace.

Let it be observed regularly. We know not how much good may be lost by a single omission. Besides, it is to the first neglect that the most strenuous opposition will be made, and after this the struggle will become more feeble till it is relinquished altogether. Is worship neglected because we are hurried away to a journey or to our labour? It ought to be considered that it is the best preparation for a journey or for labour to implore God's protection and aid, and to commit those whom we love to his care; and that a few minutes are but a small deduction from sleep, or may soon be made up by increased exertion.

There are some who never worship God in their families but on the Sabbath. And can any think it

enough to serve God when they cannot labour for Mammon? And is it the Sabbath only whose outgoings in the morning and in the evening rejoice over them? This may lead children to suppose that the religion of the Sabbath is sufficient, and that it will atone for forgetfulness of God during the remainder of the week. It will give plausibility to the representations of worldly men, when they assert that religion is a periodical thing, and that saints consider it to be so amidst all their professions to the contrary.

In conducting family worship, we must beware of being too tedious or too short. If it is hurried over in a precipitate and careless manner, it will be considered as a form which we observe from necessity, and in which we take no pleasure; and if it is protracted to an unseasonable length, children will become languid, impatient, or drowsy. It is a great fault in some families, that worship is delayed to so late an hour that its members engage in it with no liveliness, and scarcely offer to God the service of either soul or body.

Study variety. There are times in which a melancholy straitening in prayer is felt by the most experienced Christian; but God will revive us again, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Generally speaking, formality in prayer indicates either the vacancy of the mind or the coldness of the heart. It is a happy union of attainments when we are enriched with all knowledge and with all utterance. The study of the Scriptures, and of books of devotion, and a close attention to the public prayers of the sanctuary, will tend much to promote variety. With

every faculty God has connected a capacity of improvement. To us the treasures of wisdom are set open, and we are endowed with qualities for enriching ourselves with these.

3. Some directions may be given as to the conduct which becomes us after family worship. We must cultivate a temper and demeanour suited to the religious subjects which have been presented to us in the psalms we have sung and the chapters we have read. If we have seen Jehovah's steps of majesty, or if he has proclaimed the honour of his name, let us maintain the glow of admiration in our hearts. If some excellence of religion has been exhibited to us, let us exert ourselves in the cultivation of it. If any bad passion has been represented in its malignant nature and destructive effects, let us labour to destroy its influence in ourselves, and let us avoid every object and scene which has a tendency to excite it.

It may be useful also to point out to children the lessons they should learn from what has been sung and read, and the obligations which arise from these passages, and which call them to a pious temper and to a virtuous life. You sang, "I will wash mine hands in innocence,"—and will you defile them by duplicity and fraud? "I will bless thy name for ever and ever,"—and will you profane it? and "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go to the house of the Lord,"—and will you shew a reluctance to attend on public ordinances? On the ingenuous minds of the young such appeals will have a most powerful influence; and will teach them to connect the various parts of this exercise with its practical

results in the temper and conduct of every sincere worshipper.

Do not discontinue this service because you have not derived from it all the benefits which you expected. You may be assured of this, that you have failed in the manner or motives of this duty; or that God is trying your faith and patience, and will give you them at last sevenfold. The gay and the noble find not that enjoyment in the pomp of grandeur or the indulgences of pleasure which they anticipated, yet they will not relinquish them. They follow the steps of ambition and the call of amusement as if they imagined they were leading them to all that is desirable in life; and shall the votaries of this world be more steadfast than you?

Be humbled on account of the imperfections of this service, and guard against them for the future. You feel that you have never yet performed it as you wished and as you ought to have done. Let your sorrow stimulate your efforts to praise God with your whole heart, and to rise higher and higher in devout elevation of thought and feeling.

Do all in your power to promote this practice around you. If your sons or your daughters are leaving your dwellings, and are settling in families of their own, let this be one of your counsels to them, that there be a church in their house; and when you meet with them afterwards, and inquire into their circumstances, forget not to ask if their family is one that calls on God's name. What though their dwelling is splendid, and what though it abounded with corn, wine, and oil, if in it religion hath no place. And remem-

ber, that the best way of recommending it to others is to shew its influence on the peace, order, and charity of your families. If persons hear the voice of altercation as they pass your dwelling, or behold it, when they enter it, a scene of confusion and dirtiness, your family prayers will excite feelings of abhorrence at your hypocrisy, and disgust at the service.

CONCLUSION.

How much is it to be lamented that family worship has fallen so much into disuse! In the dwellings of the great it is almost entirely unknown. We hear of their domestic chaplains; but the whole of their duty, in reference to religion, lies in delivering a hurried grace at table. The evenings are devoted to the gay amusements of fashionable life; and, ah! what sacrifices of health, time, and fortune, are made there! and the morning is occupied in acquiring in sleep new strength and spirits for the same exhausting round. How venerable would the mansions of the great appear, if religion reigned there in its spirit and rites! This would give them an influence over the people which no political incendiary would be able to destroy. It is in the spirit of religion that they will find the best security for the permanence of their house.

This practice is said to be neglected by some professed ministers of religion. Such men can with no face of decency recommend this practice to others, require of parents at baptism a pledge to perform it, or inquire, in visitations or in private conference, as to their observance of it. To the other parts of their duty they will pay little attention. The good will

lament the decline of churches where such conduct is never censured, and where the laws, requiring that every Elder shall be attested as an observer of family worship, have been set aside as a sacrifice to the degeneracy of the age.

This practice is falling also into disuse among the common orders of the people. Seldom is the passer-by arrested by the voice of psalms, and rare are the traces of some of the best habits of a former age. Oh that they were led to remember whence they have fallen, to return to their first works, and to give glory to the Lord our God ere he cause darkness!

Let me expostulate with those who neglect this service. You say you have good reasons for your conduct, but what are they? Do you urge, that it is performed only by persons of mean station, and that it would expose you to ridicule? It is the practice of the excellent of the earth, nor can there be a weakness more despicable than to be deterred from our duty by the laughter of fools.

Do you plead the want of time? And is your business so vast, and your labour so extreme, as to prohibit the devoting of a few minutes to God? or has the blessing of the Lord no influence in making rich? Soon shall the angel swear that as to you there shall be time no longer; and how dreadful will that sound be to him who would give none of it to God! It would give you more pleasure in dying to be able to commit your family to the care of Heaven than to leave them great wealth as the fruit of your toil. In vain are neighbours summoned to perform family worship in succession in the irreligious man's cham-

ber when his last hour draws nigh; the sound is like the knell of death. Every note that is sung, and every sentence that is uttered, is made an instrument of anguish by an upbraiding conscience. O seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; and may the Holy Spirit form you to that godliness which is great gain to every heart and to every house where it dwells!

Finally. Let good men be thankful to him who has made their families to differ from those of others. They are not like the heath of the desert, or the garden of the sluggard; but are as a paradise where joy and gladness are found, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. Let your family devotions improve daily in spirituality and fervour, and cultivate the habit of secret prayer as the best preparation for domestic and social.

Soon shall you leave the scene of your solemnities for the house of silence; but you may go to it in the faith that, to its inhabitants, this call shall be addressed by the Prince of Life, "Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust, for your dew is as the dew of herbs." You may go to it in the hope that your children shall sing the psalms in which you delighted, and that incense shall be still offered to your Saviour's name. You feel that you would rather that your house should sink into the dust than that it should cease to be a house of prayer. Let the resolution of the Psalmist be yours, "While I live will I praise the Lord, I will sing praises to my God while I have my being." Thus may you bless your households, and may they be holy and happy under the influence of domestic worship.

DISCOURSE V.

ON THE DEDICATION OF INFANTS TO GOD.

1 SAMUEL i. 28. *I have lent him to the Lord as long as he liveth.*

THE importance which the Bible attaches to the piety of domestic life, is obvious in the many beautiful examples of it which are there presented to our view. Writers commissioned of Heaven to foretell the revolutions of empires, to denounce the judgments of God on guilty nations, and to delineate the character and the wonders of Emmanuel, have exhibited with delight the exercises of maternal piety, and the dawn of wisdom and devotion in the tender mind. From the temple and the palace, the scene of commerce and the field of blood, they lead us to the mother watching by the infant's cradle, and devoting her child to God, that he may employ it in his service, and enrich it with his blessing.

Such is the admirable skill with which these narratives are framed, that the most common incidents are detailed in a way which never fails to interest. In reading the history of the infancy of Moses, a strong sympathy is felt with his mother; and when, after hiding him for three months, we see her obliged to expose him,—putting him in the ark of bulrushes,—daubing it with slime and pitch,—laying it in the flags by the river's side,—and stationing his sister to ob-

serve what should be done to him,—we mark, with deep interest, the cares and fears of a parent's heart; but even in other cases, where no remarkable incidents occur in such histories, the union of piety and tenderness sheds such a sweet lustre over the scene, as at once charms the imagination and touches the feelings.

A very beautiful and pleasing instance of a mother's piety is presented to us in the history of Hanna. Her companion, who was jealous of the peculiar attachment of Elkanah to her, derided and insulted her. By such rivalship domestic life was often embittered where polygamy was allowed; and the arrangements of Christianity, as to this matter, are as friendly to the peace as they are to the virtue of a family. Wounded by such bitter taunts, she prayed to the Lord that she might become the mother of a male child, and vowed that, if the prayer was granted, she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life. The place and the exercise in which she made this vow, and the regard which Jehovah shewed to her prayer, lead us to attribute it to higher principles than irritated vanity. Our text shews us how she fulfilled that vow; and if we examine her conduct with attention, we shall find a most excellent spirit operating in it.

She would not present her son in the house of God till he was weaned,—till he had passed through the perils of infancy,—and till the means of support could be furnished to him independent of her. There was thus a considerate wisdom which directed the expression of her piety. In many instances religious services have neither yielded the comfort, nor attained the influence on others which was expected, by the

disregard of the suggestions of prudence as to their place and season. This prudence is sometimes scorned by the ardent mind; but it is to such characters that its restraints are most necessary, and its admonitions most useful.

During this period she had not forgotten her vow; nor could the engaging qualities of her infant, as they must now have opened on her in the sweetest beauty to a mother's eye, induce her to shrink from it. No discovery we make of the superior value of what we have devoted to God should influence us to withhold it. If the heart of Hanna suggested, "Shall my infant's face never smile on me more? and may not I substitute another in his place who may perform the duties of the house of God to which I once destined him? His loss will be that of an only son to me."—Such pleadings of nature were at once repressed by the fidelity and strength of her piety. It is mentioned also in the story, that she nursed the child thus devoted to God. She did not feel less attached to her son, nor less solicitous for his welfare, because he was so soon to be separated from her; nor did she deem it wise to commit the nursing of him to another, that the pang of separation might be less severe. So long as she could act a mother's part she would; nor did she employ any means whatever to render the sacrifice less trying to nature. While many mothers have committed this task to others, that they might be at liberty to mingle in every scene of gayety and amusement, she discharged it, though it kept her from going along with her husband to scenes of religious worship which were dear and venerable; and though it was

done to a child from whom she was to be separated at its close.

Her vow was not performed in a sullen and reluctant manner, but was paid with various sacrifices, which indicated her sense of the goodness, and her zeal for the glory of God. She felt not that in parting with her son she had done all that the goodness or authority of God could claim from her,—all that she was bound to in gratitude or submission. In offering a mother's best gift, she delighted to shew that every thing she had was ready for his service. In marking the garlands with which the sacrifices in the heathen world were adorned as they were led to the altar, we behold a cheerfulness in the services of superstition which may cover the reluctant offerer in a purer scene with shame; and the promptitude with which the expensive oblations of the former dispensation were offered, is a strong incitement to unite almsgiving with our piety. Her husband, instead of ridiculing her vow as an idle freak, or reproaching her for its rashness, and prohibiting the performance of it, entered fully into her views, and was solicitous that it should be paid. Some mothers have been thwarted in their holy and benevolent purposes by the caprice and tyranny of their husbands; but Hanna was associated with one who respected her pious feelings, and delighted to go with her in all that she did for God.

The language in which she spoke to Eli shews a spirit full of charity. She does not remind him of his harsh language and injurious suspicions, so unlike the mildness and the candour which became his office,

and so insulting to female delicacy. In prosperity and success many are ready to repay with scorn and reproach those who offended them when in less favourable circumstances; but Hanna harboured no resentment, and merely states the goodness of God, and her object in this visit to his sanctuary.

It was no small sacrifice she was now to make. She relinquishes all intercourse with her child, except what she might enjoy when she came occasionally to Shiloh to worship. Amidst these solemnities she could find little opportunity for those acts of kindness by which a mother so sweetly gratifies her own affection, and secures so high a place in the heart of her child. Occasional visits to a mother's dwelling, the remembrance and the hope of which are so soothing, were not to be expected from him.

It was not for a time only that she consented to this sacrifice, but for his life. Though a worldly man, under the impulse of some strong excitement, may consent to temporary sacrifices, and to a short season of separation from what he values, he will yield nothing which he prizes to the Lord wholly; but the pious mind bows to God's claims in all their extent and perpetuity.

She did not wait till her son's arrival at the years of maturity and vigour might fit him for the active duties of worship, but wished him to pass his earliest years in the hallowed precincts of God's sanctuary. She thought how the kindness of God should cherish him, and his power protect him from evil. It was to her most delightful, that his first exercise of speech should be in his Maker's praise, and that his mind

would open under the light and truth of his holy place.

The temper of Eli, so severe to her, might have suggested to her mind that he would treat her son with unkindness; but, instead of making herself unhappy by the apprehension of the effect which his peevishness might have upon the health and spirits of her child,—the misconstructions he might form of his actions,—the merciless severity of his corrections,—and the rigid abstinence and oppressive toil to which he might subject him, she felt no such dread, and made no stipulation as to the treatment he should receive. She committed him to the Lord with entire confidence in his merciful care who could direct to him the love of Eli, and the good-will of all connected with the place. The priest's office at that time was dishonoured by the impiety and profligacy of the sons of Eli; and many would have shrunk from placing a son in a situation disgraced by such flagrant enormities in those that held it; but this did not make the public service of God less venerable in her eyes, though it would probably stimulate her to greater earnestness in prayer that the character of her son might adorn it.

These sons of Eli were most audacious in their wickedness; and a pious mother must have felt some uneasiness at the idea of her son being placed constantly beside such men, who might be supposed eager to corrupt him, or to insult and harass him if he resisted their enticements; but she trusted that her God would keep him from evil. The most painful anxieties of serious parents have arisen from the as-

sociates with whom their children are to mingle ; but where their lot is fixed by the call of Heaven, and not by the counsels of avarice or ambition, they may hope that the grace of God will guard the virtue which he thus summons to the scene of trial.

After the sacrifice was made, she poured forth the feelings of her heart in a song of praise. It is delightful to trace the rise of her mind in that hymn, from her own mercies to the loftiest celebration of the Divine excellencies, the most glowing description of the wonders of his providence and grace, and into the most rapturous expectations of the final triumphs of his cause and kingdom.

We do not find that she ever repented of this sacrifice as giving an advantage to her rival, furnishing her and her children with an opportunity of establishing themselves in the heart of her husband to the prejudice of her son, and as putting Samuel into a situation where he might be forgotten by his father, when she might have kept him at home to remind him of his claims. Such considerations never were suggested to her mind, or were repelled by the piety which relied on God, who could make all things work for his good.

It is a beautiful circumstance in the subsequent history, that Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child girded with a linen ephod, and that his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. This little incident suggests the complacency which Hanna had in her vow, her unabated affection for her son, and the delight which

she must have felt in the progress of Samuel in vigour and stature. This little coat, made and brought up with her own hand, was a testimony of affection which must have awakened delightful sensations in Samuel's heart; and the expectation of this yearly visit must have been a happiness to both. How sweet is it when the exercises of piety are thus combined with the indulgence of the kind affections, and when in waiting on God we make our relations happy!

I shall occupy what remains of this discourse in explaining and in recommending the duty of devoting infants to God; and while your minds dwell with delight on the holy beauties of the character of Hanna to which I have been directing your attention, you will feel in them a powerful impulse to an exercise marked in her by a piety so lovely and so blessed.

I. In explaining this duty, it is scarcely necessary for me to remark, that it lies not in devoting children to the service of God in the ministry of the Gospel. This has been sometimes done by very wise men, and from the purest motives. It has led to great sacrifices, and to unwearied efforts to obtain for them a suitable education for that office. In such cases it is made in entire submission to the will of God, and with earnest prayer for his countenance. This has been done by persons who knew from experience the difficulties, toils, and mortifications incident to this holy function, and who valued it as a sphere of pious utility. The idea of a son zealous, self-denied, faithful, and successful in that office, was the most gratifying to their hearts, while the thought of his being

indolent, selfish, imprudent, and useless, was more terrible to them than all the miseries of poverty. The early piety, and the opening talent of the young thus devoted, has been the sanction of Heaven to the deed. But in other cases it has been the result of false views of it as a state of emolument and distinction, or of some impulse of the imagination which has been mistaken for a suggestion of the Spirit of God. It has been made in circumstances where the fulfilment of it was impracticable; and without aught of that reference to the will of God necessary in creatures so short-sighted and so dependent. Enthusiasm never assumes a more dangerous form than when it makes extraordinary incidents in sacred history a pattern for its conduct; and, overlooking the moral lessons which they teach, employs them to sanctify its wild impulse, and to foster its extravagant hopes.

The dedication of which I speak is common to all religious parents, and lies in their devoting their children to the study of the word of God, to the profession of his truths, to the love of his name, to the observance of his ordinances, to a submission to his will, and to the obedience of his law. It is a solemn determination to teach them the value of the Gospel, that they may embrace it; to exhibit to them the excellence and grace of the Redeemer, that they may give him their hearts, to convince them of the wisdom, rectitude, and goodness of Providence, and to lead them to the cheerful observance of all Divine precepts and institutions. And none can think of the power of the truth, of the worth of the Lamb, of the beauty of holiness, of the sovereignty of Jehovah's will, and of the recti-

tude of his law, without perceiving the reasonableness of such a dedication.

Let it not be said, that such a dedication is a usurpation of the rights of a child to judge and to act for itself, and that it is inconsistent with the title of every rational being to free inquiry and to free agency; for the infant is devoted to nought but to what the law of God claims, and what accords with his best interests to fulfil. It binds not the child in after life to that implicit acquiescence in what parents have done, which is the mere result of indolence and credulity; but to that candid examination of the will of God, and to that pious desire to know and to follow it, which will lead, by the Divine blessing, to the obedience of faith. How often do parents enter into stipulations with regard to the conduct of their children in things temporal, and in these they often act under the influence of passion or caprice; and if human laws require a compliance with their prescriptions, it cannot be deemed unreasonable to devote them to that love of God, and to that obedience to his law, which are the whole duty and happiness of man. The objection is equally opposed to the religious education of children, and originates in that infidel spirit which would leave the minds of children unimpressed with any Christian sentiment, that they may more readily imbibe impious speculations; and which would substitute for the nurture and admonition of the Lord the vain dreams of political enthusiasts, or the carnal policy of worldly wisdom.

This dedication should be made in secret prayer. While alone with your God and the God of your fa-

mily, you will do it with an overflowing of affection, and with an earnestness of manner which it would be injudicious to exhibit before your fellow-creatures.

Parents should do this in united prayer. Such a solemn service would hallow their affections and their joy; and the remembrance of it would be felt stimulating the efforts of the father and the mother in promoting the salvation of their child. Piety will make your feelings one in regard to it: "and if two of you shall agree on earth as to any thing that ye shall ask, it shall be done," saith our Lord, "of my Father who is in heaven."*

This dedication should also be made in family worship; and such a deed must tend to impress the consciences and to melt the hearts of the young. It will remind them in the most affecting way of what you did respecting them in infancy, and will urge them to the conduct which is necessary to fulfil a parent's vows.

It should be done publicly in the sacrament of baptism. In presenting infants to God in this ordinance, his claims to be served by them are solemnly recognised; the spectators are reminded that they are not their own; his grace is exhibited whose heart and kingdom are open to little children: and that blood is applied by which we are redeemed to God.

It will be highly proper that you afterwards present them to God in religious solemnities as soon as they are able to attend on them with propriety. Such scenes make an impression on the tender mind which

* Matt. xviii. 19.

is never effaced, and are associated with the sweetest and most interesting part of their being. They will delight to talk of them in after life. How solemn were the meetings of ancient Israel, when men, women, and children, were collected to hear the law of God, that they might learn to fear and obey him! and how affecting was the scene at Tyre, when the disciples, with their wives and children, accompanied Paul to the shore where he prayed!* These parents were eager to bring their children to hear the apostle's last counsel, to receive his last blessing, and to give their early pledge of discipleship; and we may believe, that the idea of his bended knees, uplifted hands, solemn intercession, and parting advice, was often present to their minds as a memento of the influence of the Gospel and of the power of devotion.

This dedication must be preceded by the parent's yielding of himself to God; for how can a father or a mother devote a child to the service of that Being whose laws they habitually violate, or to an adherence to that Gospel which they do not believe? It is from an experience of the power, and a conviction of the obligations of godliness, that this is done to the glory of our Maker, and to our own comfort. It must be done with the seriousness which becomes a transaction so solemn, and every thing must be avoided which has a tendency to excite carnal mirth. In the festivity which has followed these services, serious impressions have been enfeebled in the minds of parents, and effaced from those of children; and what might have

* Acts xxi. 5.

been remembered as a day solemnized and blessed by piety, has been recollected as the season when its rites were the prelude to voluptuous indulgence and to noisy mirth. And it must be done with a determination to employ every effort in your power to carry into effect the solemn service, and to form the young to wisdom and to goodness.

The propriety of the mother's presence at this solemn deed is obvious from the text. Her heart must accompany the surrender made by the husband, and the prayer of the minister for the infant baptized must be made her own. The haste which calls for baptism before the mother can go with it to the house of God is the result of ignorance and superstition, and deprives her of a service in which she must feel a peculiar interest, and in which the exercise of her piety is pleasing to the Father of all. The complacency which the Saviour expressed in the conduct of the mothers who brought their infants to him, that he might lay his hands on them and bless them, was a pledge of his regard to every expression of maternal piety, and of that benediction with which he should reward its holy dedication, and answer its earnest prayer.

There have been mothers, who, by the absence, the misconduct, the scruples, or the death of their husbands, have been called to present their infants to God in baptism, and who have looked forward to this scene with much anxiety and terror. But the example of Hanna may encourage you, and that God who acted to her with such condescension will not frown upon you. Your tears shall be wiped away by a

kinder hand than that of any earthly friend, and your trembling hearts shall be fixed in the quietness and assurance of religious trust.

II. I shall now recommend this duty by a few motives.

1. Consider Jehovah's claims. "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward."* What a wondrous and delightful view of his condescension! It is not said of angels or of archangels, but of children and infants. For them he cares, and in them he is glorified; he gave you your infants, and it was with this view that they might be nursed for him. Every emotion of delight which you feel in the appearance or qualities of children appeals to the gratitude which prompts to this deed. It is he who hath placed you in circumstances favourable to the spiritual and temporal welfare of your children, and who hath promised you all the grace and direction which you require in fulfilling any holy purpose respecting them. Think how God can punish your disregard of his claims. How quickly may he waste the beauty that charms you; arrest the progress of your child to vigour and maturity, or humble its mind in utter imbecility. What is withheld from him shall be kept for a curse.

2. Consider what God can do for the infants thus devoted to him. He endowed Samuel with great wisdom and piety, exalted him to a high estate, and enabled him to perform the most signal services for

* Psalm cxxvii. 3.

his country. Few occupied so high a place in the veneration of the Israelites, and he is still regarded as one of the best characters of the former dispensation. It would be foolish to expect results like these from your dedication; but God may make your children wise to salvation, upright and charitable in the humblest sphere, and esteemed by all around them for their good qualities. Goodness is better than greatness; and the retirement of an obscure situation is more favourable to tranquillity than the cares, toils, and bustle of high places. His employment of his power in our behalf is regulated by that wisdom which knows what is best for us, and by that goodness which delights in mercy. In the sovereignty of his mercy he may call some to be witnesses for his truths, and trophies of his grace, from families sunk in ignorance, impiety, and wickedness; but in general it is in the dwellings of the pious that he raises the children to the places of the fathers, and in moral utility and glory makes them princes in all the earth.

I may add, that he will bless the families where children are thus devoted to him. He gave to Hanna, whose first-born was thus lent to the Lord, other children in his place; he would not suffer her to be without the presence of children in her dwelling, in rearing whom she might exercise the sweet care of a mother, and we may believe that in other respects he loaded her with benefits. The means of happiness which he possesses are various and inexhaustible. Where one comfort has been sacrificed for him he can supply the want by many comforts of a similar description, or by other advantages more valuable; and

when the loss is made up by no outward benefit, it shall be much more than compensated by spiritual blessings, by the impressions which he produces and the hopes which he inspires.

3. Consider that this dedication does not require from you the sacrifices which Hanna had to make. It does not call you to relinquish the society of your children, or to yield to others the task of opening the mind to useful knowledge, and guiding their affections to the noblest objects. Under your roof and under your eye their early years will be spent, and the moral influence of this service will render their manners more endearing. The ardent affections of youth are peculiarly pleasing when elevated by devotion and guided by wisdom; and their pursuits can be marked with unmixed approbation and complacency when guarded by the integrity and animated by the benevolence of genuine virtue.

You have heard of parents among the heathen sacrificing the innocence and the life of their children to idols, and such is the power of superstition that it can make the heart of a mother consent to such an offering; but you yield your offspring to the renovation of the Holy Ghost, and place them under the care of the God of salvation.

4. This dedication will have the best influence on your conduct to your children. It will powerfully stimulate you to all the duties of pious tuition. You must feel, that to be negligent after such pledges would expose you to the censure of the world, and to the condemnation of your own hearts. You will consider their instruction in righteousness as carrying into

effect purposes suggested by the best principles, and seeking in action their proper result.

It will preserve you from placing them in situations, however favourable in a worldly point of view, where their religious or moral principles are likely to be corrupted, and will lead you to prefer a scene less lucrative but more safe. It will incline you to seek for them connexions in life with whom they will walk with God, and to disregard that splendour and wealth which are associated with the works of darkness and with the spirit of the world. It will prompt you to act as those devoted to God, that you may shew them the beauty of a religious life. To every temptation which would lead you to remit the strictness of your discipline, the vigilance of your superintendence, or the regularity of your lessons, this will be your answer,—"I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot go back."

5. Consider the influence which it will have on them. They must have other reasons besides this for devoting themselves to God. His authority and love must be its grand impulse, but it may strengthen good impressions when they think on your pious solicitude for their spiritual welfare. They will feel that it would be an insult to parents to profess their affection to them if they remained opposed to their most solemn purposes and dearest wishes.

It will have a powerful influence in preserving them from every improper attachment, in leading them to alliances favourable to piety; and when they are placed in families of their own, they will practise that dedication of children to God which you have told

them was so pleasing to you, and which they have felt to be so beneficial.

Finally, How soothing will the remembrance of this deed be, whatever may befall you or your infants. If you are taken away from them while they are in infancy, you have this delightful impression, that they are the Lord's. Death dissolves your relation to them, but it affects not his claim. To part with your children will be your last and severest pang; and that they may live piously and wisely will be your last wish for earth. Now nothing can be more fit than your devoting them to God for the last time in your dying prayers, and leaving them bound by all the solemnities of that scene to be his. This close of parental duty will sweetly sooth you. In committing them to the care of earthly friends, you cannot be certain whether they shall be faithful to their trust, or even live to undertake it; but in devoting them to God, you resign them to one whose eye never slumbers, whose faithfulness never fails, and whose love never decays. How affecting was this language of a man of God in the near prospect of leaving his family! "My children are young and helpless, but I have committed them to God, and he will be a Father to them. I have no wish that they should be rich or great in the world. My only wish respecting them is, that, like Obadiah, they may fear the Lord from their youth."*

* The person referred to is the late Rev. James M'Farlane, Dunfermline, a much-valued friend of the Author, and of whose kindness of heart, ingenuousness in conduct, eminent piety, and energetic eloquence, he must ever retain a lively impression.

If disease seizes on them you have this consolation, that they are receiving only parental discipline. You yielded them to God that he might dispose of them as he pleases, and this should repress every murmur at the mode, the severity, or the continuance of their affliction.

If they die in early life, you will find every tendency to repine, or to despair, repressed by remembering your surrender of them to God. At the side of the cradle, or the bed, where the infant is dying, you should devote it to God to serve him in heaven; and you will feel solaced by the thought, that God is calling your child to glorify him in nobler employments, and in a higher sphere than that for which you had destined it. For these spring flowers there is a large space in paradise. The Redeemer hath said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."*

CONCLUSION.

It is a reflection which naturally arises after such a subject has been illustrated, how gross the abuse is which the superstitious have made of the conduct of Hanna. Some of them have considered it as requiring them to consign their children to convents and to monasteries; and so completely have the feelings of nature been repressed by the influence of such false views of religion, that the sacrifice has been made with exultation, and they have regarded it as shedding a brighter lustre over their families than if they

* Mark x. 14.

had placed them in the highest office, or in the most splendid alliance. Thus have they bereft themselves of the endearments which might have cheered their dwelling, and surrendered to the chilness and the gloom of monastic life an intelligence which might have enlightened,—a gentleness which might have adorned,—and a kindness which might have blessed society. The dedication which the text inculcates is more worthy of the Deity, more rational for the parent, and more happy for the child.

Let us remember how we were devoted to God. If your parents were pious, you will shrink with horror from the idea of rebelling against their best deed for your happiness. If any of you have reason to think that it was with your parents a mere form, it becomes you to give reality to it, and let the grief you feel at the idea of their hypocrisy stimulate you to godliness. O act not as if you had been devoted to vanity, or folly, or avarice, or ambition! These are masters whose work is degradation, and whose wages are ruin.

Let ministers of the Gospel exhibit to parents, when they apply for baptism to their children, the nature of this dedication. This is one of our best seasons for faithful dealing; and it is a most criminal negligence to suffer them to go away without a religious question or a serious advice. Much reason have families had to bless God for the fidelity and zeal of the ministers of Christ on such occasions. The increased attention of parents to religious ordinances and to domestic piety has attested the influence of a pastor's admonitions.

Let me call on parents who have seen in their families the happy result of this service, to give glory to him who accepted their offering; and to labour while they live that they and their children may be more entirely the Lord's. And let parents who have not yet been gladdened by such results be humbled for those deficiencies in their lessons, prayers, and example, which may have occasioned their disappointment, and let them still labour to turn their disobedient children to the Lord. They that sow shall reap; and they that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Let parents, whose dedication of children to God has been a mere form, adore that mercy which hath kept back the vengeance they deserved for this hypocrisy; and let personal and family religion be from this moment your choice, and from this day your practice.

Let us all, before we leave this place, devote ourselves to the Lord, knowing how pleasant the course of such a life must be, and how blessed its close. I beseech you, by the mercies of God, by the cross of the Redeemer, by the prayers of parents, and by the regard you have to your own welfare, that ye present your souls and bodies living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

DISCOURSE VI.

ON THE SPIRIT TO BE EXERCISED AT FAMILY MEALS.

RUTH ii. 14. *And Boaz said unto her, At meal time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.*

THE story of Ruth exhibits to us with great simplicity and liveliness some of the customs of the East, and various interesting traits of character. The manners of a country are in a great measure formed by its climate, its laws, and its religious institutions; and this will be kept in view in every estimate which is made of them by the judicious and the candid. The little resemblance which the scenes in this book bear to those which we see in countries differently situated, can only excite the ridicule or the incredulity of the rash and the inconsiderate, and will appear to all acquainted with the habits of Eastern nations, a very striking indication of the authenticity of the narrative.

It sets before us the care of Providence over the desolate widow, and the unconquerable power of pious resolution, and furnished a pledge of the admission of the Gentiles to the privileges of the church. The pious mind will find in it a pleasing illustration of the grace of the Lord Jesus, who took part of our flesh and blood, that, in the capacity of our kinsman, he might

redeem the inheritance which had been forfeited by the fall, and unite us to himself in the spirit of holiness. The man who can slight it as an idle tale shews little taste or wisdom; and he who looks to its scenes for matter for his licentious jests, evinces a depravity of mind to which there is nothing pure.

The attachment of Ruth to her mother-in-law was highly honourable to both, and it is by no means common in that relation. The mother-in-law is apt to be jealous of the influence of her daughter-in-law over her son, and to find fault with the management of a dwelling, of which she has no longer the direction; while the daughter-in-law is as ready to regard the mother of her husband as a spy upon her actions, and as eager to seize every opportunity of thwarting and censuring her. But Ruth resolved to live and to die with Naomi, and was eager to exert herself for her support. Many in her circumstances depend on the relatives of a deceased husband for support, and if they are unable to give it, through poverty, imagine they do well if they maintain themselves without aid, and that they are the last persons to whom a mother-in-law should look for help; but Ruth judged more generously and more nobly. She felt that on the vigour of youth the infirm relative has a claim, and that this was the most honourable tribute she could pay to the memory of her husband.

Having followed her into the land of Israel, she solicits permission to go and glean in the fields, that she might bring home something for the subsistence of both. Providence directed her to the field of Boaz, and, influenced by the humanity of his temper, and

by the favourable accounts he had heard of the piety of Ruth, and her kindness to Naomi, he readily allowed her to glean among his maidens,—charged the young men not to touch her in any wanton frolic, and invites her to come at meal time, and partake of the repast which he should provide for his labourers. This kindness of Boaz to a stranger was peculiarly amiable in one so secluded from other nations as the Jews were; and his prudent vigilance to repress levities common in such scenes of labour was worthy of the character of a wise and holy man, and sharply condemns those who encourage or connive at follies by which the modest are pained and the simple are corrupted.

Without enlarging further on this beautiful story, it is my object in this discourse to point out the spirit which should be exercised at family meals. The topic, though familiar, admits of serious illustration. It is a great mistake to imagine, that the influence of religion is to be limited to particular places or days, for it must pervade every hour and every scene; and when it appears in such a form as accords with the pure and gentle spirit of the Gospel, it will render the most common incidents improving and delightful.

1. Piety should be felt and expressed in grateful acknowledgment of his goodness who prepares our table. The light of nature taught men the propriety of this, for the Athenians never partook of an entertainment without first acknowledging the gods, by offering some part of it to them. The revealed will of God expressly inculcates what reason had suggested, for it tells us, "that every creature of God is good,

and is to be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Yet there are too many, even in this land, to which God hath been so favourable, at whose meals no service of this kind is to be found. No sight can be more shocking than a table loaded with the fruits of God's goodness, around which his name is never mentioned but in profanity. The guests in such scenes may boast of their honourable principles, and of the fidelity with which they discharge all that one man owes to another; but where is their sensibility to the goodness of God, and where is the homage which is due from them to Him by so many a tie? There are others who have a form of thanksgiving, which loses all interest by unvaried repetition, and which is commonly hurried over in a very careless and irreverent manner. Such persons will speak with a sneer of the long prayers of some before their meals; and while it is to be regretted that any should so frame these services as to subject them to the imputation of unseasonable and Pharisaic, the cold and meagre sentence of those who affect more good sense and refinement is far more disgusting to a well-disposed mind.

Let those who neglect this ordinance remember who it is that gives them strength and skill for labour, and crowns their efforts with success; and let those who observe it without interest or reverence consider, that by acting in this manner, they profane a religious rite, make serious things contemptible in the eyes of their children, and render that insipid and disgusting to themselves, which, if performed in a different manner, would cause the heart to glow with sacred pleasure,

and impress those that heard them with the power and the beauty of devotion.

It is a most interesting fact, that it is the coarsest meal which is most marked by holy gratitude, and that this gives it a relish which no art can supply. In conducting this service, good men should aim at a pleasing variety of expression,—should imbue it with the grace of the Gospel, and should perform it in a manner which may strike the young with awe. Behold the blessed Jesus, when about to feed the multitude, taking the loaves, and when he had given thanks, distributing them among them.* Behold also the Apostle Paul in his voyage to Rome, taking bread and giving thanks to God in the presence of them all, and then breaking and eating it, and encouraging the passengers and the crew to partake with him ;† and in such conduct you will find a sanction to this service of piety, which will induce you to resist every attempt to discard it.

2. The suggestions of prudence must be attended to in reference to family meals. Prudence will fix them at hours best adapted for those employed in labour, and will in ordinary cases observe all necessary punctuality. He whose minutes are limited cannot tarry for the slow procedure of the indolent; and there can be little comfort in that meal which is preceded by the feelings and the language of irritation, excited by the want of due activity and care. A prudent family will regulate its meals by its engagements in society, and much expense is incurred, and much agreeable inter-

* John vi. 11. † Acts xxvii. 35.

course is prevented, where members of families do not partake of them at the same time. Fashion and caprice should give way to convenience. "Wo to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!"*

Prudence is shewn also in adapting family meals to our circumstances. There is a meanness and parsimony visible at the tables of some, which is quite unsuited to their wealth and station. Society is so constituted, that many in the lower orders are employed in preparing what is superfluous or ornamental for the higher classes; and the rich, who, under the influence of a sordid spirit, confine themselves to the coarsest fare for food, and to the meanest raiment for clothing, may flatter themselves that they are recommending that temperance which is the best security of a nation; but they withhold from the poor their desire, and discourage the industrious by their senseless austerity.

In others, there is a profusion and a nicety which are as little adapted to their condition. He who lives in a way beyond his earnings, and who borrows to supply his table more fully, shall soon find that source dried up, and shall be left to indigence, not merely unpitied, but aggravated by the ridicule to which he is subjected for his extravagance and presumption.

3. *Affection blesses Family Meals.*—Strong are the ties by which the hearts of the members of families are united, and their sitting around one table at meals

* Eccles. x. 16, 17.

is a beautiful exhibition of their common interest and feeling. Affection must operate in such a scene, and should be expressed in the language and in the attentions of kindness, and when it doth so, it makes the homeliest repast delightful. "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."* How unbecoming in such a scene is the scowl of anger or the brawl of contention! If to partake of their hospitality is considered among the most daring and rapacious of savage tribes, as giving the stranger a claim on their protection, much more surely have they a claim on us for every office of kindness, who were brought up with us round the same table.

The members of families, who have been by their various avocations separated for a few hours, find, in the affectionate intercourse at meals, the sweetest solace after their period of loneliness, or of association with the rude or the perverse. And how beautiful has been that superiority to selfishness which some have shewn at such scenes, when they have denied themselves what they might have claimed for the sake of others, whose situation seemed to require it more than theirs did!

In the delightful story of Joseph's intercourse with his brethren in Egypt, when they were invited to eat and to drink in his presence, we are told, that he took and sent messes unto them from before him, but Benjamin's mess was five times as much as any of theirs. In thus distinguishing Benjamin, we see a kindness which accords with the peculiar relation in which he

* Prov. xv. 17.

stood to him, and which, from one in his circumstances, could excite no umbrage; but partiality in the most of cases is unwise and unjust, and distinctions should never be made, but where every heart must be conscious of their justice.

4. *Cheerfulness should gladden this Scene.*—There is a childish levity, an excessive hilarity, or a satirical humour, which have been manifested on such occasions. When this levity and hilarity are shewn by those who are beyond the stage of mere childhood, they should be taught that a conduct more respectable becomes them, and that cheerfulness must be rational and moderate, in order to its being permanent or agreeable. The young ought to be told how closely a satirical humour is allied with malignity, and that no temper creates so many enemies as this.

Others have gone into the opposite extreme, and by their sullen silence, gloomy countenance, and austere manners, have rendered a scene the object of disgust or fear, which should be sweet and inviting.

The cheerfulness of which I speak is the happy medium betwixt these extremes, and is the result of that complacency which the good feel in the kindness of God, and in the society of those who are dearest to them on earth. No right-hearted man can look around him, while he sits at meals, and behold the wife and the children God hath given him, happy to be near him, and solicitous for his comfort, without exquisite delight. Such a man need not envy the most splendid or luxurious banquet at which the opulent or the noble can sit down. It is at such a scene that his heart is lightened of its anxieties; and while he sees his own

satisfaction reflected from every countenance, his joy must be full. The young, who are at a period of life when all seems bright, find at such seasons the most delightful emotions in communicating to those that love them the success which will gain their approbation, and the prospects which will gratify their wishes. The joy which has been restrained in the scene where it was felt to be unsuitable, is now expressed with a degree of pleasurable feeling, which more than compensates them for the temporary restraint.

Even little children feel the enlivening influence of the scene, and while the more advanced charm the rest by details so sweet to affection and to hope, the gayety of the smiling infant, delighted at the return of those whose attentions have endeared themselves to it, is felt in unison with the general satisfaction. "Go thy way," says the wise man, "eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun."*

5. *Sobriety must be maintained at Meals.*—This is a quality, which, from a regard to their reputation, some will exercise in mixed society, but they indemnify themselves for this self-denial by intemperate indulgence at home. Such persons violate the rules of sobriety in a scene where they should be peculiarly re-

* Eccles. ix. 7, 9.

spected. Such a man degrades himself before his family, and with the loss of their respect the influence of his counsels must cease. In order to the efficacy of a counsel, there must be an impression of the sincerity, the wisdom, and the moral worth of him that gives it. Others may judge of it by its intrinsic qualities, but the young will form their opinion of it by the character of the adviser; and what impression can they have of him who contradicts what he inculcates, but that his lessons are a form which he neither respects nor wishes to be regarded?

Children are likely to receive the most fatal impressions as to the propriety of moderation, who behold it thus violated, and their course in life will probably be the same or worse than their fathers'. How can such a parent check any such tendency in a child? He must be aware that the restraint which he imposes will be felt to be selfish, arbitrary, and tyrannical, and under this consciousness he is tempted to connive at follies which ought to be repressed with all the wisdom and authority of parental discipline.

Every excess is most injurious to health, and will soon unfit a man for the regular discharge of his duty. Such a man's conduct at home cannot long be concealed from the world, and will be more severely condemned than his who is a jolly companion at every festive scene. No indulgence is proper at meals which unfits a man for engaging immediately in his usual business.

Sobriety is to be maintained in all other places.— "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee; and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not

desirous of his dainties, for they are deceitful meat. Hast thou found honey, eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith and vomit it."*

It is of great consequence that children should be taught the wise regulation of their appetites, and how unseemly and pernicious excess is; and nothing will convince them so effectually of the propriety of restraint, as self-denial in those older than they are. How beautiful is the account given us in the book of Daniel, of the temperance of the Hebrew children, to whom the king appointed a daily provision of his meat, and of the wine which he drank, but of which they declined partaking! Some of the dishes were probably unclean according to the law, and Daniel might deem such indulgence inconsistent with his condition as a captive, and with the state of his country. The prince of the eunuchs urged his compliance with the order of court, and Daniel entreated him to prove them ten days with pulse and water, and at the end of that time their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than those of the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. This incident in sacred history teaches the young, that plain and wholesome food is most favourable to their health and vigour, and that the dainties which stimulate, and the luxury which pampers the appetite, are injurious to the constitution, and debase and corrupt the mind.

There are seasons when more than usual indulgence may be allowed with the best effect, as when it is given as the reward of any peculiar display of diligence, be-

* Prov. xxiii. 1, 3.

nevolence, or integrity, or when it is associated with seasons, which are too often rendered disgusting to youth, by austerity and gloom; but wisdom must regulate all such indulgence, both as to its extent and frequency.

6. *Contentment*—There are some who are dissatisfied with meals because they are not so sumptuous as those of some others. They sit down to their own repast, grudging that their table is not so well furnished as that of some others who have fewer claims to it than they have. This is a malignant feeling to their neighbour, and it is full of impiety to God. He hath the portion assigned him by the Lord of all, and yours comes from the same hand; and there may be some who regard your allowance, much as you scorn it, with as much envy as you do that of your more prosperous neighbour.

There are others whose discontent shews itself in their complaints respecting their meals, in which they indulge their own fretfulness at the expense of the comfort of their partners, and the peace of their dwellings. A temper of this kind, when it has no good cause of complaint, will create it and maintain it in defiance of truth and candour. Such a man puts into his cup gall and wormwood, and compels his family to drink of it.

Nicety and fastidiousness are tempers which ought not to be encouraged in children, for they will tend to make them unhappy in themselves and disagreeable to others. A disposition to be easily pleased is a proof both of wisdom and of benignity. Such a person will find instruction in discourse, from which

the fastidious turn away their ears in contempt, and enjoyment in scenes, against which they inveigh as utterly insipid. The consciousness how unworthy we are of the least of God's mercies, will fill us with wonder that our tables are supplied so fully and so constantly.

7. *Hospitality.*—When the circumstances of families admit of it, the passing stranger, or our neighbours and acquaintances, should be invited occasionally to partake with us. In the intercourse at such meals valuable information may be given and received, and a friendly temper exercised and gratified. The histories of Scripture present us with many beautiful examples of this hospitality. Thus, Abraham, when he saw the three strangers, ran to meet them, and after courteously inviting them to refresh themselves, and taking butter and milk, and the cakes which Sarah had kneaded, and the calf which the young man had dressed, set it before them. And how beautiful is the incident of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus! They constrained our Lord, saying, "Abide with us; for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them."* It is true, that our circumstances are very different from those of the inhabitants of the East, and that places of accommodation open their gates every where to the stranger; but in situations where they cannot be reached, or when he is unable to avail himself of

* Luke xxiv. 29, 30.

them, he should be received readily by those who can do it.

Occasional entertainments given to neighbours and acquaintances, are friendly to benevolent feeling, and productive, when properly conducted, of real enjoyment. In such scenes of festivity our Lord was occasionally seen; and it is an austerity neither sanctioned by his spirit nor precepts, which frowns on all the joyous intercourse of life. "Use hospitality one to another without grudging," is the commandment of Him who knows our frame and seeks our happiness. Nothing can be more unwise than the temper which, instead of making the friends of a husband or of the young welcome at fit seasons to a dwelling, forces them to entertain them at taverns, and thus alienates the affection which might have been retained, and tempts to excesses to which they never would have been led in their own families.

Lastly.—It becomes us to think, when we partake of the bounties of Providence, of those who are destitute of daily food, and by sending them a portion of what has been prepared for ourselves, we relieve them in a manner the most safe and effectual. The allowance to a poor neighbour will not be missed from your board, and it leaves a blessing wherever it is taken. In this country, the legal provision for the poor is utterly inadequate to their support, and is intended to assist in maintaining them along with the supplies of food and clothing from the charitable around them. Thus, it does not encourage improvidence in the labouring classes, nor repress the feeling of compassion for the needy. I was hungry and ye

gave me meat, is the language in which Christ will acknowledge such kindness; and thus the wise man exhorts us, "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."*

Our Lord gave this injunction in the house of one of the Pharisees, into which he had gone to eat bread: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee; but when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed."† The feasts to which our Lord here alludes are those which were made on the remains of the tenth part of the produce of their fields, and of their cattle, which they were enjoined to set apart for thank-offerings. The part of that tenth which they had not been able to bring to the altar, or consume in offerings, they were obliged, every three years, to estimate, and to employ it in benevolent entertainments. Now to these the poor and the afflicted had the best claim; and in the spirit of this injunction, let us deal our bread to the hungy,—let us account nothing too good for them to share, and we shall find that Providence will supply that table from which the needy receive their daily allowance, and to which their eyes are directed in gratitude and hope. There is a sweetness in the meal in which charity is thus gratified, which nothing else can impart; and the

* Eccles. xi. 1, 2. † Luke xiv. 12—14.

idea of such distribution will be felt the most effectual preservative from that careless management in which so much is wasted, and the best corrector of that selfishness which is so apt to work in indulgence.

Such is the spirit to be exercised at family meals, and by such tempers and conduct we glorify God, whom we supplicate to give us day by day our daily bread,—ensure our own happiness, and promote the welfare of our relations. This spirit will render family meals, times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and pledges of our eating and drinking with Christ hereafter in his heavenly kingdom.

DISCOURSE VII.

HUSBANDS AND WIVES EXHORTED TO PROMOTE THE SALVATION OF EACH OTHER.

1 Cor. vii. 16. *For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? and how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?*

It is the peculiar glory of Christian morality, that it presents to us the noblest object of pursuit in every condition and relation of life. While the maxims of the world teach us to look only to selfish indulgence and to present advantage; and while philosophic morality sets before us cold and vague speculations on duty, and exhibits the principles of morals in a form so abstruse, that few can comprehend them, and in a manner so general, that it is difficult to apply them in the various incidents of life, the Bible specifies the manifold tempers and deeds of beneficence and piety by which we may glorify God, promote the best interests of our brethren, and deliver our own souls. It calls upon us in an especial manner to seek the salvation of those with whom the God of Nature hath connected us, as the chief object and blessing of our union. To this conduct the apostle points the attention of husbands and wives in the text, and he was led to it by a question of considerable difficulty which had occurred in the primitive churches. The converted wife or husband was ready to imagine, that the embracing of Christianity rendered it necessary

for them to separate from a partner living in idolatry, and that to the higher obligations of their new creed every earthly attachment must be sacrificed. But Paul shews that the Gospel warranted no such cruel fanaticism, and that it was their duty to remain with those with whom Providence had connected them, and to labour, by living under the influence of the spirit of the Gospel, to win them to the knowledge and the love of the truth. And what object can affection propose more important or dear?

In this discourse I shall specify some of the methods by which a husband or a wife should labour to promote the salvation of an unconverted partner, and recommend this pious solicitude by some motives.

I. Prayer is the first of the means which should be employed for this purpose. This is an exercise which God hath prescribed in order to our obtaining any blessing whatever; and it must be viewed as peculiarly requisite in order to the gaining of an object which cannot be accomplished without supernatural agency. It has a most powerful influence to stimulate us to the use of every proper method to accomplish the end of our prayers; for we feel that it would be a mockery of Heaven to solicit benefits which he will only grant in the use of certain means while we live in the total neglect of these. A conduct of this kind is marked by the grossest folly and presumption.

Of all prayers, none are so acceptable to God as those which are directed to the salvation of ourselves and others; he may refuse to listen to us when we pray for the wealth or the worldly advancement of a

friend or relative, because he sees that this, if granted, might prove a snare to the soul; but to prayers for grace and glory he will lend his ear; for in these he is magnified, and men are blessed for ever. Let those whose hearts are sighing over the irreligion of a partner in life enter into their closets, and plead with God that he may impress the careless heart, make them know their true interest and duty, reclaim them from every evil habit, and bless them with the fruits of the Spirit. Precious to the Almighty are the tears which attest the earnestness of such prayers, and which say that you would rather live with a pious husband in poverty and toil, than with one profligate and impious in all the splendour of the world.

You have heard of the importunity with which favours have been sought from men by one relative in behalf of another; how an affectionate wife, to whom the idea of a husband's banishment or death was intolerable, has rushed into the presence of kings, and with all the moving eloquence of nature, has implored for them the royal mercy; and while you applaud this effort of love and courage, you certainly must feel it impelling you to solicit from the God of salvation that pardon and grace which alone can save from death eternal.

2. Another method to be used to gain the salvation of an unconverted partner, is serious conversation and counsel. This measure requires to be employed with great prudence and delicacy as to the season and the mode of it. If it is introduced at a season when, either from levity or passion, they are unfit to listen

to it, it will be turned into ridicule, or be repelled with indignation. And if it is brought forward in a way that savours of harshness or spiritual pride, it will excite no feelings but those of disgust and irritation. The manner in which this mean should be employed is stated very beautifully in the character of the virtuous woman in the Proverbs. "She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness."* And a word spoken in season is like apples of gold in net-work of silver, through whose reticulations their colours appear with additional beauty.

There are various events and seasons at which serious conversation may be introduced with the happiest effect. If some special mercy is received, it is fit that the goodness of God should be celebrated, and the obligations which it lays upon us to love and to serve him exhibited. This is a season when the heart is melting with the divine kindness, for exhibiting the exceeding riches of his grace, and for raising the eye of gratitude to God's unspeakable gift, and filling our song with its praise. When death has entered the house, and torn one of the children from the bosom, it is surely proper in such a case to impress the mind with the conviction of the uncertainty of all earthly joys, with the love of God in delivering up his Son for us all, and with the necessity of immediate preparation for our latter end.

In the season of misfortune, when the failure of others, or the ill success of their own efforts, has be-

* Prov. xxxi. 26.

reft them of part of their property, it is most fit that they should exhort one another to seek the blessings of an everlasting salvation.

When a husband or a wife are stretched on the bed of sickness, instead of that light conversation, which only tends to hide from them their danger, and to aggravate the misery of their awakening hour, it is meet that you should speak of the Deliverer from the wrath to come, and of the power of faith and hope to dissipate the terrors of death.

After acts of folly, serious admonition will happily co-operate with the remorse of the offender's mind to lead him to repentance. It will be vain to give it while reason is stupified, or the spirits are elated by intemperance, for this will only drive them back to the scene of folly; but when sobriety returns, and the aching head and the reproaching conscience make them serious, the reproofs and the counsels of virtue may lead them to abhor that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good.

3. The uniform exhibition of Christian excellence has a great influence in promoting this object. Conversation on serious subjects may be stigmatized by the profane as cant; and the virtues which they see exhibited before the world they may consider as ostentatious, as practised for applause or some sinister motive, but the graces which are displayed before them in the retirement of domestic life, and with that consistency and permanence which hypocrisy can never attain, and which is the test of genuine piety, must have a most powerful influence on the minds of ungodly relations. The meekness with which a wife

bears a husband's excesses of passion—the fortitude with which she receives the intelligence of the severest worldly losses—the resignation with which she lays her child in its coffin—and the blessed hope in which she triumphs in the prospect of dissolution—have often made an ungodly man to feel and to acknowledge the value of religion. On the other hand, the fervour of a husband's devotion—his patience under the most provoking outrages—his holding fast his integrity amidst temptations the most trying—his giving God the glory when others would have been inflated with pride—and his mild acquiescence in the wisdom and goodness of Providence, when the influence and success is denied to him which is granted to others—have impressed the careless wife with the reality and the power of godliness.

The virtues of those we love appear enrobed in additional beauty, and the heart must be depraved and obdurate which is not gained to goodness by their influence. The apostle Peter ascribes to the meekness of wisdom a power over the heart of an ungodly relative superior to all other means. "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear."* The most effectual method which Christians can adopt to recommend religion to all around is a holy life.

4. Their salvation may be promoted by alluring

* 1 Peter iii. 1, 2.

them to the means of grace. It will be of importance to direct them to books which you think adapted to their situation. Rebukes and cautions will be less offensive to their pride when presented to them in books than in the course of conversation; and do not give them reason to think that you imagine the book is only adapted for usefulness to them, but shew that you are endeavouring to profit by it. Let not the books you put in their way be those which are intended to vindicate the peculiarities of a party, or which are imbued with the spirit of sectarianism; but let them be such as exhibit the great objects, recommend the pure morals, and breathe the liberal temper of the Gospel.

If they have prejudices against their public instructors, endeavour to overcome these, and to induce them to listen with candour and seriousness to their lessons and exhortations. When children are to be baptized, it is surely incumbent on you to impress them with the vows of God, and to urge them to yield themselves to the Lord; and when the sacrament of the Lord's supper is dispensed, you have an opportunity of calling up to their view the most interesting events that ever happened on earth, and the Saviour's cross and love in all their merits and power.

In the lessons which are given to children, the good of their parent may be aimed at. In the efforts which you make to teach them to sanctify the Sabbath, and to reverence the name of God, you may restrain the impiety of a wicked father; and in setting before them the beauties of a courteous and humble deportment, you may excite in their parent's mind an abhor-

rence of surliness and haughtiness of manners, and form them to that poverty of spirit which prepares for the kingdom of God. And wherever there are scenes around you where the folly of security in prosperity, the danger of procrastination in religion, the misery of vicious habits, the supporting and consoling energy of grace, and the power and mercy of the great Redeemer, are displayed, let their attention be directed to these, and the happiest results may be anticipated.

5. Watchful care must be employed to keep them from all temptations to sin. You must study each other's tempers, and the moral dangers to which each is exposed, and give suitable warnings against them. If there are parties where a husband is in danger of being led to intemperance, to be shaken in his religious or moral principles, and to have serious resolutions counteracted and devout impressions quenched, you must use all your influence to keep him from such scenes. The fools that make a mock at sin, the men of strength to mingle strong drink, and the licentious caviller, are companions with whom they cannot safely associate. Encourage about your dwelling the meek, the grave, and the wise. Their society may want those fascinations of wit and gayety which so often secure the profligate a welcome; but the lips of the righteous feed many, and there is a pleasure felt in reflecting on what they said, while the sarcasm of the scoffer is remembered with pain, and the merriment of folly with shame and disgust.

If a husband sees reason to fear that the attention of the wife is more occupied with securing to herself and her children the vain show of this world than

about the advancement of their spiritual welfare and her own, it is his duty to direct her views to the kingdom of God and the righteousness of it. When envy is beginning to work, inculcate the charity which finds in another's prosperity an incentive to gratitude and a cause of delight; when pride is swelling, shew that it was not made for man; when anger is kindled, quench it by referring to the meekness and the gentleness of Christ; and when discontent is fretting, silence it by the voice of lively gratitude.

In preserving one another from sin, you perform the most important service, and keep them from that which is more horrible to a pious mind than the most awful calamities. "I love you, my son," said a godly woman, "with all the tenderness of which a mother is capable; but I would infinitely rather see you fall dead at my feet as that you should commit a crime." And how grateful was David for being restrained from sin, when he said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand."*

II. I proceed now, in the second place, to recommend this pious solicitude by some motives.

1. Consider how many are suggested by the relation in which you are placed. You are bound by the

* 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

great law of love to seek the eternal welfare of all your brethren of mankind; and your obligations are still greater to pursue the salvation of those with whom you are so closely connected.

This also is one of the great obligations which you became bound to fulfil in that day in which Providence joined you together; and it is to be lamented that this is so little pressed on the attention of persons in such circumstances, and that it is so little thought of by many afterwards. Indifference to this is thought no inattention to the marriage vow; but how opposite will be their views of it in that hour when death is parting those to be united only in misery hereafter, who by the spirit of piety might have been prepared for dwelling together in the house of the Lord for ever! Then that pious concern which was ridiculed as silly and teasing will be seen to have been the best expression of wisdom and love.

2. Consider the importance of salvation. You are eager to preserve one another from temporal evils, and to restore a sick partner to health. For this purpose you grudge no ministrations of toil or watching. You cannot bear to see your partners in want of any thing which you think essential to their comfort; but in leading them to Christ you conduct them to a Saviour from hell, and to the enjoyment of glory, rest, and immortality. If you cannot bear the idea of seeing those whom you love abandoned by their friends, groaning under pain, or loaded with reproach, how could you endure to behold them cast off by Jehovah for ever, clothed with shame, and howling under the vengeance of an angry God? If it delights

you to see those whom you love respected, healthy, and happy, the rapture must be great indeed with which you will behold them placed among the princes of God's people, shining as the brightness of the firmament, and possessors of fulness of joy. It is to make them happy for ever that I am now calling on you to labour; and doth not this deserve from you every possible effort?

3. Consider how much your own happiness will be promoted by their salvation. In their salvation they will be delivered from the dominion of those evil tempers, and from those bad practices, which should be your disgrace and your misery. The true Christian will never be a negligent, far less an unfaithful or a tyrannical husband. The graces of true religion will give a sweetness to his manners and a kindness to his attentions, which will render his society most delightful. How blessed will your mornings and your evenings be by his devotions, your meals by his cheerful contentment, and your sorrows by his meekness and patience! The improvement which he will make of the incidents of your lot, the relief which he will impart to you in difficulties and trials, by suggesting to you suitable promises from the word of God, and the interest he will take in your griefs and joys, will be most valuable advantages. And in all the comfort which he will derive from communion with God, he will be most desirous that you should share. He will comfort you with those comforts with which he is comforted of God, and labour to raise you to those hopes which animate his heart. Religion gives him that to communicate which no wealth and no renown

can yield. How contemptible is Haman, telling his friends and Zeresh his wife of the glory of his riches, how the king had promoted him above all his princes and servants, and how he alone was invited to the queen's banquet, when compared with the pious man telling what God hath done for his soul to the wife of his bosom, that she may magnify the Lord with him!

4. Consider how much this solicitude will tend to advance your own salvation. You cannot be careful about their salvation and indifferent about your own. You will be constrained, by every effort which you make to further the divine life in them, to press towards the stature of the fulness of Christ. The praises with which you commend the Saviour to them will endear them to your own hearts. The efforts which you make to set their affections on things above will strengthen your heavenly-mindedness. Every statement which you make of the evil of sin will increase your own abhorrence of it; and your attempts to impress them with Jehovah's kindness to them will animate you to livelier gratitude for his benefits to you. You will find it impossible to trifle away time while you are urging them to redeem it; or to absent yourselves unnecessarily from religious ordinances; or to wait at wisdom's gates in a languid and careless manner, when you are calling on them to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

They will labour, in return, to further your salvation. Instead of being burdens on you, to retard you in your course, they will quicken you in God's holy way; and instead of damping your fervour and marring your joy, they will be helpers of both. They

will labour to facilitate your observance of Gospel ordinances, and your obtaining the means of religious improvement. It will not be with you as with rowers, when one strives against the other to the stopping of all progress, and to the danger of their lives; but it will be as when both unite their efforts in the course of the vessel, which carries it on in a manner easy, rapid, and safe.

The subject we have been considering, suggests various reflections and exhortations.

1. How opposite is the conduct of some to that which the text recommends! They profess great sorrow for the aversion of their partners from what is serious and good, but instead of employing the methods which have been recommended, they irritate them by the exposure of their follies: and let none imagine, that by detailing the foibles of a relative they can gain any credit to themselves. Others retain about their dwellings those whose conversation and habits have a corrupting influence in their families; and such is the frantic zeal of some who have adopted infidel principles, that they cannot rest till they have turned aside from the faith those with whom they ought to walk in the truth, and taught them to apply to the sacred mysteries of religion the language of profane mockery, and to its laws and sanctions, that loose and accommodating explanation which divests them completely of all their solemnity and power. Some characters of this description have been punished in a manner the most horrible. By undermining the religious principles of relatives, they have left them an easy prey to the enticements of sinners. Where the

fear of God hath no influence, where the sense of his presence is effaced from the heart, and where no future account is anticipated, the power of temptation hath little to repel it, for the true principle and the best motives of virtue are not there.

2. Let those who have not yet found these methods successful beware of becoming weary in their efforts. It is the will of Christ that you should pray always and not faint, and in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not. Bless God that irreligious relatives are not yet beyond the reach of your efforts, or of divine mercy. You have not been called to weep over their graves the bitter tears of utter despair. Let this thought suppress your murmurs.

Recollect also that the grief you feel on account of their impiety, may be the chastening of Heaven for your folly in connecting yourselves with an irreligious husband. You were apprized of his true character, you were warned of the danger and misery which attend such a preposterous connexion as that of a disciple of Christ with a man of the world, but under the influence of an infatuated attachment you would listen to no counsels. You soothed your conscience with the romantic dream that you would form him to virtuous habits, and that maxim flattered your vanity and allayed your fears,—"A reformed rake makes the best husband,"—a maxim fit only for the slang of a theatre and the creed of a fool, and which is insulting to the purity of the female character. Now God is calling you to mourn over your folly and presumption, to warn others not to act as you did, and to pray

that his grace may accomplish what you vainly imagined you were competent to effect.

Perhaps your own conversion took place since your union was formed. You did not marry in the Lord, yet did God turn you to himself; and though the means which were successful in converting you had no influence on your partner, there are other methods which he can employ, and by which he can turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.

And I may add, what are your efforts that you should complain of the want of success, when the Lord Jesus stretched out his hands all the day long to a disobedient and to a gainsaying people? If his warnings and counsels were heard, and if his miracles and graces were seen in vain, it doth not become us to complain that we have spent our strength for nought. But perhaps your partner is gone, and the dreadful impression harrows up your souls, that he over whose impiety you have so often sighed, died in his sins, yet it becomes you, like Aaron, to hold your peace; or, if you open your lips, let it be to acknowledge that to the Lord belongeth righteousness, but to you shame and confusion of face, because you did so little to excite him to receive and to improve the great salvation.

If they are still with you, let the idea of the shortness of life stimulate your efforts. Now is the day of salvation for them and for you. It will be honourable to you when they bear you this testimony in judgment, that you did what you could to bring them to the Saviour.

Finally, Let those whose efforts have been blessed

for the salvation of an ungodly partner, give glory to God who has crowned them with success. You will feel all your anxieties and toils repaid, when, with the voice of love, they acknowledge their obligations to you, and state in the words of Paul about Philemon, that "they owe to you their own selves besides."

Be solicitous about their growth in grace, and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Think it not enough that your partner is a Christian, but be zealous for his eminence in religion. Superiority in worldly accomplishments is followed by results which are limited to the present scene, but eminence in grace shall be rewarded by a glory in Heaven that shall last for ever.

While you labour to promote their spiritual and eternal welfare, forget not their temporal comfort, but provide for them things honest in the sight of all men. Put not their patience to unnecessary trials by your indolence and sluggishness, nor their contentment, by subjecting them to the privations of a rigorous parsimony, and think not yourselves entitled to unlimited acquiescence in all your plans.

Guard against mistaking the evidences of grace, by ascribing to religious principle conduct which may spring from a less noble source, and by imputing to natural feeling what arises from the melting energy of the Spirit of God. Study the graces of the Spirit; rise together in these to him who is your pattern, even Christ; and thus shall you find, that the piety which has cemented and blessed your union, shall alleviate its dissolution by the sweetest consolations which can flow from gratitude and hope.

It has been acknowledged in the dying song of departing Christians, as one of the mercies of their lot, that God had connected them in life with a religious partner, by whom they were instructed, guided, and animated in the light of the Lord; and this is the epitaph which marks the spot where they sleep together in the dust, to whom God gave one heart, and one way, "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless."*

Happy is the pair who are one in Christ. May this be the felicity of all your families. It is from union to Him that those graces are derived, which adorn every relation, that influence which purifies every attachment, and that hope so dear of the blessed and perpetual intercourse in heaven of those connexions, whose hearts and dwellings on earth were a home for the Saviour.

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* Luke i. 8.

DISCOURSE VIII.

GOD'S CARE OF THE OUTCAST.

GEN. xxi. 14—20. *And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, (putting it on her shoulder,) and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow-shot; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad: and the Angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand: for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water: and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.*

THERE is a charm in the simplicity of nature which is felt and acknowledged by all, and in no scenes is it experienced so powerfully as in those which are exhibited in the early narratives of Scripture. While the mind is soon sated with descriptions of Eastern

magnificence, the splendour of its palaces, the sumptuousness of its feasts, and the number of its armies, it marks with unabated delight, the journies of the patriarchs over its deserts, the movements of their flocks, the worship at their altars, and the hospitality of their tents. In these scenes the painter finds the finest subjects for his pencil; the divine, the early dawn of the day of salvation; the moralist, the most touching illustrations of his counsels; and the pious, an excitement to their faith, and a support to their patience. No disguise conceals from us the workings of feeling, or the motives of action; but the heart is laid open before us in its plans and struggles, while Providence appears in direct and visible agency for the protection of the helpless and the encouragement of the faithful.

The history of Abraham is full of interest. He appears to have possessed the kind affections of the heart in no common degree of strength and tenderness; and it was in these that his faith and obedience were most severely tried. The scene before us displays not his character in so great a light as in the intended sacrifice of his son Isaac, yet it manifests such a subjection of his feelings to the Divine will, and such reliance on the care of Heaven for the welfare of those who were to be no longer under his eye, as were truly admirable.

The sending away of Hagar and Ishmael was necessary to the peace of Abraham's family. Sarah was offended with the mockeries of Ishmael, and jealous of his interfering with the rights of her son, and insisted on their dismissal. Much as Abraham loved

Sarah, his heart rose against the proposal, nor could he be induced to consent to it, till God said to him, "Let it not be so grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and of the bond-woman;" and assured him, that though Isaac should be distinguished by peculiar privileges, Ishmael should be protected and prospered for his father's sake. The will of Heaven thus intimated to Abraham he could not dispute; and the interesting scene which followed is detailed in this passage in a very touching manner. The solitary wanderer, the wretched outcast, the helpless orphan, and the mother watching by the sick-bed of her child, have felt this narrative as the voice of Heaven bidding them be of good comfort, and have learned from it to suffer in silence, and to rejoice in hope.

When Abraham had resolved to send Hagar and her son away, he did not postpone the execution of his purpose to a distant period, but acted suitably to that prompt obedience to the will of Heaven by which he was so much distinguished. He rose early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar (putting it on her shoulder,) and the child, and sent her away. This seems a scanty allowance, and neither suited to Abraham's wealth, nor to the support of the mother and the son, but it was deemed sufficient for them till they arrived at the place which he had fixed for their residence. We may conceive him assuring her that he would not be unmindful of the interests of her son; and in a moment so serious, he would not fail to address those pious counsels, the value of which might now be felt. Little was Abraham aware that her confidence in God

should soon be so severely tried; but though he had foreseen the whole scene, he could not have raised a prayer more suitable than that one which so affectingly expresses all that a father and a saint could wish,—"O, that Ishmael may live before thee!"

We read not how Sarah conducted herself at this separation. There had been long hostility betwixt them, and she probably rejoiced in the hope that she and her son should now be the objects of his undivided affection. Selfishness will make some contemplate with exultation because it humbles a rival,—scenes which awaken the pity of a generous heart. It is not said that Hagar manifested any unwillingness to go. The jealousy and scorn of her mistress must have embittered her situation in a variety of ways which Abraham could not notice, and of which she felt, that to complain would only aggravate the evil. Besides, there is something in the idea of liberty soothing to the heart, and which has made the slave attempt his escape from bondage, though he knew that if it should be effected, a life of toil, seclusion, and peril, awaited him. Such was the subjection of servants to their masters at that period of society, that she knew it was in vain to struggle; nor does she ever reproach Abraham as unnatural and cruel. She discovers in this scene a greatness of mind far above her station. How superior is the person who suffers in silence, to those whose lips are full of murmurs against God and reproaches against man! We may believe that her mind was supported by the remembrance of the appearance and promises of God, when she formerly had fled from the face of Sarah. Hagar

departs with a heart full of regret as to the past and fear as to the future. Engrossed by the sad reflections that rose in her mind, she attended not to the way in which she was going, till she is lost in a wilderness.

She wanders up and down in hopes of reaching some tent, where she and her son might be entertained according to the hospitality of the East, and directed on their way to the place of their destination, but no refuge was near. It was impossible to travel long under a scorching sun, and over burning sands, without feeling intolerable thirst. The water in the bottle was soon spent, and there was no hope of obtaining a supply. Hagar would deny herself that measure of it which her thirst demanded, that she might give the more abundant supply to her son. There is nothing felt so dear or so necessary to a mother, which she will not relinquish for the safety of her child. How many a mother has, at the risk of her own life, ministered to a child in infectious distempers! and sometimes it has happened, that the one has sunk under the efforts by which the other was saved. We may believe that when the water was spent, she would sooth him with the hope of their soon coming to some tent or spring where their necessities might be relieved. Many will suggest hopes to relieve the despondency of others, which they know to be vain. The mother will shew a smile on her face to a sick child, and talk cheerfully to him, for she knows that the look of despair from her eye, or its language from her lips, would be felt as the sentence of death. Hagar found at length that hope could no more be

cherished, and that a mother's voice had lost its power to sooth.

In such circumstances, a boy's spirits and vigour could not long bear up. Sometimes a sick child has been able to rebuke the murmurs and to revive the hope of a parent, but Ishmael's strength was gone, and he appears to have been incapable of making the least effort to move further. "To be thirsty in a desert," says a traveller in the East, "exposed to the burning sun, without shelter, and no hopes of finding relief, is the most terrible situation a man can be placed in, and one of the greatest sufferings which a human being can sustain; the eyes become red, the tongue and lips swell, a hollow sound is heard in the ears, which brings on deafness, the brain is inflamed,' and the whole frame burns as in a fever. Hagar had supported him when he was unable to go; but finding her own strength failing, seeing nought to be gained by attempting to carry him further, and supposing that the last hour of her son was come, she, in an agony of grief and horror, cast him under one of the shrubs, and sat down over against him; for she said, "Let me not see the death of the child; and she lifted up her voice and wept." She felt how justly she was punished for her ingratitude for the comforts of her master's house, and that had she taught her son the duty and respect he owed to Sarah and Isaac, she should not now have been a perishing outcast. The shade of a shrub is all the shelter she can now procure him,—a sorry exchange for a father's tent. Every hope which had soothed her in the hour of her departure had now abandoned her; and in this

sad journey she felt that she had led her son to his grave.

It is a beautiful circumstance in this narrative, that her only anxiety respected her son. It was on his account that she sobbed and wept. Dark and perilous was her own lot, but her son's fate absorbed all her thoughts. It is not said that God heard her voice, but the voice of the lad.—Was this the mere wail of nature in distress, or was it the voice of prayer, which a father's piety had taught him to utter?—Whatever it was, the Father of Mercies listened to it in pity, and called his mother to lift him up and hold him in her hand.—" But my son is gasping for thirst, and no drops are falling from heaven, and no fountain is sending out its waters to relieve him." Ere she could express such reflections, God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, which in her perplexity and confusion she had not observed. How often do men find relief in quarters where they least of all expected it ! A sphere is opened for employment where it was never solicited ; an opportunity is given for the successful exercise of arts which had been acquired with no idea of practising them ; and passages of Scripture have been pointed out to spiritual sufferers, which, in the hour of perplexity, they could not discern, and in which they have found wells of salvation, from which they have drawn water with joy. Say not who shall ascend to heaven to bring comfort down, for the word is nigh thee, and Christ in that word.

God could have recovered Ishmael without means, but he furnishes her with them, and renders the use of them effectual. The bread by which our hunger is

satisfied is as really his gift as the manna which fell from the clouds; the water which gushes from our fountains is as really his gift as that which issued from the rock at the stroke of his rod; and the cure of disease is the result of his agency as well as the instantaneous removal of it by miracle.

It is easy to conceive what would be the feelings of Hagar at this moment,—her heart would overflow with wonder at God's condescension, who had not despised the affliction of an outcast and a slave; gratitude for her son's deliverance,—affection to a child thus reviving in her arms,—hope in the continued care of Heaven and in the future welfare of her son, and joy in a scene where the shadows of death had been turned into the morning. God's wonders of mercy are performed not merely where there are crowds to admire them, and to perpetuate the memory of them by records and monuments, but in the desert, where the stone which was set by the pilgrim for his pillow, or the shrub which was his shelter, is the only memorial they can select that the Lord hath helped them. Often have we marked in the records of travellers through the desert, signal instances of the care of Heaven, when God's presence has been felt in reanimating the languid spirit, in furnishing the means of supply, in awing or softening the heart of the robber or the savage, and in checking or diverting the rage of the elements.

But this was not all the care which Providence took of Hagar and her son. By that well they could not abide, and the bread which was in their store would soon be consumed; and God directed them to a place in the wilderness where the necessaries of life might

be easily cultivated,—where he was their keeper and their shade, and where Ishmael's posterity to this very day exercise the power, maintain the independence, and enjoy the advantages promised to their progenitor. Amidst the wrecks of the most splendid empires, and all the vicissitudes of this world's fashion, the Arab remains the master of the desert, and his taste and habits are as in the days of old.

This narrative, thus rapidly explained, suggests much valuable instruction.

1. What a variety of circumstances may produce separations in families! Dissensions sometimes give rise to it, as in this case, but it may be produced by other causes. Misfortunes have compelled parents to send away children to earn that subsistence for themselves which they can no longer afford them. Sad was the case of the prophet's widow, who cried to Elisha, saying, "Thy servant my husband is dead, and the creditor is come to take my two sons to be bondmen!"* In many families children have been sent out to serve, who once seemed more likely to be ministered to by others.

In some situations, sons have been forced away from their parents to fight the battles of their country, by land or by sea. This was the expedient by which the mighty armies were collected which so lately spread devastation over Europe; and it is to be regretted that this method should have been so often adopted among ourselves for manning our fleets, and that the

* 2 Kings iv. 1.

claims of wives and children were as little considered as those of parents.

Sometimes, too, this separation arises from an adventurous spirit in children, and from bright visions of wealth and glory in a distant land. Such views may be often chimerical, but no advice nor persuasion can repress this desire; and by the gratification of it, Providence calls forth the energies of the human character, which would have slumbered in the indolence and obscurity of home, and promotes the civilization and the commerce of the world. It is, in many cases, in vain for parents to attempt to impede their purpose either by threats or promises; and it is better children should go with their allowance than elope in secret. In these circumstances, let parents address to them the counsels and admonitions of piety and wisdom. Some parents have shunned giving such counsels, and have made the parting hour that of mirth and festivity; but this is not acting with courage, but with folly. The parting counsel and prayer which come from the heart will go to it. They have occurred to servants, and made them turn away from the enticements of sinners; they have risen to the view of the sailor a prisoner in an enemy's country, and have determined him to hold fast his integrity; and to that of the soldier bleeding to death in the field of battle, and have directed him to the Throne of Mercy.

2. To what situations of extremity may they be reduced in whom Heaven is deeply interested! Dismal as the condition of Hagar was, it has been exceeded in gloominess in the experience of many of whom the world was not worthy. Many a father, when, by the

loss of employment or of health, he could not labour for his family, has seen that "the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruze" are spent, he has parted with every piece of furniture which he could possibly spare, and applied for relief to all he thought would befriend him, but in vain. Every sound he hears he imagines to be the approach of those whom his creditors have sent to drag him to a jail. They come and tear him from his wife and children, whom he leaves without a morsel, and without a friend, to go to a prison where his tears are his meat both in the night and in the day, and where, in the wildness of his sorrow, he prays that death would unite in the grave a family which misfortunes and oppression have ruined and broken.

How sad was the case of Job when the messengers announced to him that the fire from heaven had consumed his sheep, that the Chaldeans and the Sabeans had carried away his oxen and his camels, and that his sons and daughters had perished amidst a scene of jollity in their elder brother's house! And who would not have exclaimed in such a case, Will nothing but my utter ruin satisfy the ministers of destruction? Is it not enough that I am made a beggar that I must be left without a child to support and encourage me? Is not a broken heart sufficient, and why must my body be full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores? But how different was his language,—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."*

* Job i. 21.

We may remark, that there is no situation so distressful in which some comfort may not be got. You may not have the shadow of a great rock, but if you have that of a shrub, you ought not to repine. You may not have rivers of water in a dry place, but if you have but a well or a spring despise not the day of small things. You may not have friends to extricate you from difficulties; but if you have friends to condole with you, and to bid you be of good courage, you have reason to be thankful.

3. How much is this scene adapted to suppress the murmurs and to stimulate the exertions of afflicted parents! Nothing is more common than for persons in affliction to imagine, that never were there any tried as they have been; but were you as fully acquainted with the circumstances of others as with your own, you would find that the cup of many was larger and more bitter than yours. There is not a single circumstance which afflicted parents can mention to justify their murmurs to which an answer may not be found in this scene.

Are you ready to fret, that the distress of your children has been so sudden in its attack and so quick in its progress? Behold Ishmael leaving his father's house in the morning in health and vigour, and before noon his strength has sunk, his spirits have failed, and death seems ready to close his eyes for ever.

Are you repining at the severity of your children's sufferings? Think what Ishmael must have felt. The burning heat of an eastern sun, though he was not in a desert, made even a Jonah faint and wish in himself to die.

Are you tempted to repine that your children are so poorly accommodated in their distress? Look to Ishmael stretched on the burning sand, with no shelter but that of a stunted shrub, without even a drop of water to cool the tip of his tongue. Do you feel disposed to repine because you have so little to support you under the fatigue of ministering to sick children, and that no sympathizing acquaintance draws near you? Look to Hagar sitting alone in the wilderness, with nothing near her but some dry bread which, for want of moisture, she cannot swallow. Is it the place where your children have become sick that incites you to murmur, saying, Had this malady befallen my child at home I would have borne it, but for my son to die in a land of strangers is intolerable? But what is this to Ishmael's perishing in the desert, where, as Hagar thought, no hands could prepare his grave but her own? Instead, therefore, of complaint or repining, be grateful to God that he corrects you in measure.

Let this scene stimulate your exertions for their relief. In the tears of Hagar we see how powerful natural affection is, and how strong is the compassion which a mother hath on the son of her womb. This principle owes not its influence to the refinements of civilized life; for it melts the heart and stimulates the labours of the barbarian and the slave. Miserable would be the situation of children in distress were they left to the cold charities of a stranger; and sweet is the refuge which Providence hath opened to them in the bosom of a mother. No eye watches and no voice sooths like hers. Whether Hagar acted

right in quitting her son I will not pretend to say. She went not from him till she deemed his case hopeless; and we may be certain, that it did not arise from deficiency, but from excess of feeling. There have been parents who, with equal tenderness of heart, but with more fortitude, have clung to their children in their dying moments, resolved that none but they should receive their last breath. That it was the will of Heaven that Hagar should exert herself for the relief of her son is clear from the voice of God, and from the speed with which she relieved his thirst.

Let no parent say, Were I certain as she was of my child's recovery, I would most cheerfully minister to him; but though his case is hopeless your ministering to him may make his last moments more calm and his last struggles more easy. Even the infant in sickness finds comfort in the ministrations of a mother. No hand can smooth a pillow as she does; wipe the sweat from the brow or the tear from the cheek so softly, or bind up sores so tenderly. The most nauseous medicines seem palatable when she says, "They will do you good." When a child dies, every instance of neglect in a parent's treatment of it rises to her mind in the most distracting aggravations. In the hour of desperate sorrow the imagination will suggest what more might have been done, and conscience will almost charge them with its murder, and require its blood at their hand.

Say not, The fatigue of such a scene will be intolerable. As thy days are so shall thy strength be. In the long and solitary nights of your child's distress,

the Father of Mercies shall be continually with you. With his eye upon you, can you be tardy in helping your sick child's body, or careless in imploring salvation for its soul? The consciousness of obeying the voice of nature and the law of God, of contributing to the relief of the child you love, will shed a comfort over the scene of watching and toil, which pleasure never gave in the scene of mirth, which indolence never yielded on the bed of ease. If your child lives, he will more than reward you. If he dies, your fatigues will be more than compensated by the reflection, that you have done your duty. Their dying look shall testify the gratitude which they feel; and their last words may invoke blessings on the mother who did so much to save them from death, and whose throbbing heart dictates the wish affectionate but vain, "Would God I could die for thee, my son, my son!"

4. How gracious and seasonable are the interpositions of Heaven The voice heard by Hagar was indeed a word in season, and the well which she saw was the most pleasing object that ever her eyes beheld. Many such interpositions are presented to us in the history of Scripture. And do you remember none, O ye saints of God, which you have experienced or witnessed? Are there no parents here who can say, that when they were told there was no hope of the recovery of their children; when, in the sinking of their pulse, the changing of their features, and the coldness of their limbs, they saw reason to believe that the opinion was just; when they were sorrowing bitterly at the early extinction of their dearest hopes, the distemper has subsided, nature has revived, the

fixing eyes have been turned to them with an expression of gratitude and love, and the tongue which they imagined would speak to them no more has said, "I shall yet live to make you happy?"

It hath been sometimes seen, that when the woes of an unfortunate family were swollen to the brim, when its head was on the threshold of a prison, the mother speechless with horror, and the children were shrieking for their father, that a generous man to whom the story has been accidentally told has come forward and given them complete and permanent relief.

I may mention, as another instance of the seasonable interpositions of Heaven, that when the awakened sinner was on the brink of despair; when the Bible appeared to him as a land of darkness; when blasphemous thoughts made him start from his knees, and terrified him from attempting to pour out his soul before the Lord; when ministers seemed commissioned to aggravate his horrors, and to tell him that God had sworn in his wrath that he should not enter into his rest; when his soul was choosing strangling and death rather than life, a voice has cried to him, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." His eyes have been directed to the fountain of mercy, and from it he hath drawn the water of life. Such interpositions of Heaven are transporting like the pardon put into the hand of the despairing criminal; or like the boat reaching, after many ineffectual attempts, the rock from which the rising tide was on the point of sweeping the exhausted seamen away. Let none say, "The Lord doth not interpose thus in my behalf in trouble; my way is hid from the Lord, and

my judgment is passed over from my God." Wait on the Lord and he shall save thee. Soon you may have it to say, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death." *

Finally, How prosperous have many children become who were sent away with but little from their father's house. Who can have a less portion than Ishmael, who left his father's house a boy in the hand of his mother, who had nought for his support and her own but a little bread and a bottle of water, and yet how rich and potent did he become? Behold Joseph lifted out of the pit, carried down into Egypt by the Ishmaelites, and sold there as a slave; but mark how he rises till Pharaoh's ring is put on his hand, till a chain of gold is put on his neck, till he rides in the second chariot of the king, and is made ruler over the land of Egypt. Behold David taking a little parched corn and ten loaves to his brethren in the camp, and going out to meet the Philistine with five smooth stones in his bag, and his sling, and thus commencing that career of glory which led him from the task of a shepherd to the throne of Israel. We have often seen those to whom their parents made a most liberal allowance of this world's goods, like the prodigal son, waste their substance in riotous living, and obliged to submit to the most degrading employments to earn a subsistence, while many who entered on life with nothing, have risen, by diligence, sobriety, and wisdom, to wealth and honour.

* Psalm cxviii. 17, 18.

Abundance in youth benumbs the vigour of the soul, flatters their vanity, exposes them to the allurements of vicious pleasure, and furnishes them with every facility for the gratification of their corrupt appetites. Thus doth the prosperity of fools destroy them; on the other hand, poverty stimulates to exertion, cherishes frugal habits, and forms to persevering industry. Thus doth the hand of the diligent make rich.

Let not Christian parents fret that they have little silver or gold to give to their children. If you have given them sound principles, of a religious and moral kind; if you have trained them to frugality and self-denial, to honesty and to diligence; if you have given them the blessing of a pious and affectionate heart, you have bestowed on them a portion better than fine gold or choice silver in the greatest abundance. Let children who have got these from their parents, and are ready to fret when they think this is to be their all, while they hear of others coming to large possessions, remember, that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. This fretfulness will offend God and ruin your own comfort, but godliness, with contentment, is great gain. "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" * and in his gracious presence you shall attain what is truly desirable, and enjoy what is best for you and yours.

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* Heb. xiii. 5.

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DISCOURSE IX.

ON THE MISCONDUCT IN PARENTS WHICH PRODUCES DOMESTIC MISERY.

PROVERBS xi. 29.—*He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind.*

THE Proverbs of Solomon contain many excellent maxims adapted to promote the happiness of domestic life. While he enriched his kingdom by promoting commercial enterprise, while he adorned it by the splendour of public institutions, and blessed it by a wise and faithful administration of justice, he laboured to cherish that spirit in families which will prevent the bitterest sorrows in scenes to which human inspection cannot extend, and over which the fear of God can alone shed a salutary influence. These maxims well deserve the serious and constant attention of families. If persons are not happy at home, they will seek for it in vain in other circles. The idea of the misery to which they are returning will cloud every scene of enjoyment, and none of those domestic feelings or habits will be cherished which yield the most pure and exquisite delight.

In the most of cases domestic misery is owing to the folly or wickedness of the heads or the members of families, and seldom arises from the afflicting hand of Providence; yet it is of Providence that men complain, and seldom of themselves. They will assert, that they set out in life with the best intentions, that they used every practicable expedient for promoting

the happiness of their connexions, but that some unaccountable fatality blasted all their schemes, so that although they deserved to be happy, they have been peculiarly miserable. It is thus that men conceal from the censure of conscience their own criminality or indiscretion, and raise against the equity and the goodness of God the complaints which their own conduct alone deserves.

The words of the text lead us to point out some sources of domestic misery which are to be found in the conduct of some heads of families; and let us hear with candid attention. Let those whose faults may be brought to remembrance be excited to an immediate and zealous amendment. Irritation at the admonitions of religion will only be injurious to themselves. The fidelity of a preacher of righteousness is rewarded by the approbation of his own heart; but the most gratifying result of it which he can behold in this world is the reformation of those whom he has warned and reproved.

1. Some trouble their own houses by their ungoverned tempers. There are various circumstances which lead men to control their tempers before the world which cannot influence them in their families, and there they are accustomed to give them their full scope. Some trouble their houses by a fretful temper. They find a ground of complaint in every thing, and no efforts of skill or tenderness can render them contented. If the ground of their displeasure is removed, their ingenuity soon suggests another. If such a man's family is cheerful, they are accused of a want

of sympathy in his cares and vexations; and if they are sad, they are charged with ingratitude for his kindness, and a sulkiness which no effort can dissipate. Even a prompt compliance with his wishes hath no merit in his eyes, but is ascribed to the accordance of his plan with schemes of their own. Miserable is that dwelling the head of which hath such a temper. Such a man is a continual dropping which must wear away the firmest and most patient disposition. A great calamity confounds and overwhelms the faculties, but reason and hope will soon exert their influence, and lift up our heads; but under an evil whose bitterness is hourly felt, which we have tried every effort in vain to remove, and which we justly fear will be the curse of all that remains of existence on earth, the heart sinks in despair. And what advantage doth a man gain to himself by this temper? He must lose the affection and the respect of his family; and the fretfulness which makes them miserable is his own torment.

Some trouble their houses by a passionate temper. They are kind and attentive while free from anger, but a frivolous incident will kindle them into fury, in which they will heap the most virulent abuse on those who have the strongest claims to their indulgence. In some cases this is borne in silence; but there are other tempers which are provoked by it to render railing for railing, and raging passions thus opposed to each other must produce the most horrid confusion. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; but the wrathful man sows the wind, and shall reap the whirlwind.

Some trouble their houses by a contentious temper, which involves them in quarrels with their neighbours, and in these their families must take a part. Thus a neighbourhood, where families might make one another happy, is filled with persons spreading around them suspicion, calumny, and mischief. To thwart the schemes, to blast the credit, to embitter the afflictions, and to trespass on the rights of one another, is too often the conduct which is prompted by the envy and the revenge of parents, and in which children are trained to exercise their ingenuity. A mild proposal for reconciliation is repelled with a rage which terrifies its maker into silence. Happy is that neighbourhood over which the olive spreads its shadow, and where the peace of candour and brotherly kindness reigns; where the wisdom and meekness of heads of families prevent all strife among themselves, and repress those contentions which arise from the indiscretion and petulance of the young; but where parents make their families partners in their feuds, malignant passions are strengthened in themselves, while they are awakened in their children, the evils of discord are transmitted from age to age, and are often aggravated in their course. From quarrels among neighbours neither honour nor advantage can result.

Some trouble their own houses by the obstinacy of their tempers. To the most reasonable proposal for the happiness of its members, if they have once disapproved of it, they can never be brought to listen, and the comfort of their children is sacrificed to their absurd, haughty, and malignant prejudices. They imagine, that by acting in this manner they will maintain

their authority, and secure the peace and order of their dwelling; but even the most meek and gentle will at last be roused to resistance, and by one decisive effort they will shake off the control which was exercised only to make them miserable.

Some also trouble their own houses by partiality and favouritism. On one in their families they look with fonder affection than on the rest; to indulge him, the comforts of his brothers and sisters are sacrificed, and while he is caressed they are repulsed or neglected. And what is the result of conduct so unjust? Envy is kindled, animosity is produced, and deeds of mischief and violence fill that dwelling with misery which well-directed affection might have blessed.

2. Some trouble their own houses by avarice. Avarice contributes in a variety of ways to make the family of the covetous man miserable. He engages in excessive toil himself, and exacts from them labours to which their strength is unequal, and under which their spirits sink. Such premature exertion hurries them to the grave, or is carried on with a reluctance and a dissatisfaction which increase every difficulty, and often prevent them from finishing their task in the manner and at the period expected, to the disappointment and irritation of the selfish and imperious. It is the appointment of Heaven which must be fulfilled, that "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase."* Instead, therefore, of permitting any

* Eccl. v. 10.

relaxation, success prompts him to demand increasing exertion, and the extension of the means of enjoyment only renders their yoke more grievous.

Avarice also leads some to the most niggardly conduct with regard to their families. They give in the scantiest manner, and with the surliest grudges, what their education demands, and thus produce disgust and complaining among those whom they should labour to make happy. Parts of education necessary to the respectable exercise of particular professions are denied to the young, and no tears of theirs, and no expostulations can enlarge the pittance of the eager scholar. Even the maintenance of children is arranged with such parsimony, that the wants of nature receive but a scanty supply, and the consequence of such conduct is, that they sometimes have recourse to methods of a dishonourable kind to obtain what they wish, by which their moral principles are corrupted. They may solicit that supply of their necessities from others which the niggardliness of parents denies them; and think how this must degrade you in their estimation and in that of the world. They may be induced to pilfer from you what you thus unwisely withhold; and by thus stealing from their parents they are prepared for stealing from others when they find that their wishes cannot be gratified by an easier mode.

The avarice of some troubles their houses by engaging them in a variety of schemes for enriching themselves, which are recommended by plausible arguments, but which they are not qualified to execute properly. In following out these they involve them-

selves in much anxiety, often lose the fruits of their former labours, and lay up for themselves reasons for the bitterest regret for the remainder of their lives.

The avarice of others leads them to grieve their families by thwarting their children in forming connexions for life. If the persons to whom they are attached possess not the fortune on which their hearts are set, though they should be distinguished for the most estimable accomplishments, and for the utmost propriety of conduct, they will reject them with scorn. Their characters may be respectable, their manners agreeable, their talents high, and their industry, skill, and steadiness in business the theme of praise to all that know them, yet all these combined cannot conquer the scruples of avarice, or kindle into good-will the heart which it has hardened. And too often, under the influence of avarice, have the young been forced to sacrifice the dearest attachments of their hearts, and to give their hands to those who had nought to recommend them but the number of their acres and the extent of their wealth. It is folly to ask if such connexions are happy? Such a parent may see his child rolling in affluence, and shining in the splendour of the world, but if he could look into the heart he would behold it scorning the vain show around it, and sighing at the thought of the worth and the affection it has lost.

The avarice of some leads them to trouble their houses by repining at the superior wealth and success of their neighbours, and by the gloomy views which they take of human life and of its scenes. Such men repress every effort of sympathy and charity, and

teach their children to be hard-hearted, oppressive, and griping like themselves. The charitable man brings to his family the blessings of gratitude; and as he sees the raiment which their compassion destines for the naked, and the bread set apart as the portion of the hungry, beneficence sheds through his heart its most pleasing emotions: but the avaricious man knows no such joys, and every thing in his dwelling is appropriated by the most sordid selfishness. Little does he think to what enjoyment he closes the hearts of the young, and of what advantages he deprives them which they might enjoy in the returns of the grateful and in the rewards of Providence. To form the young to envy is to make them both guilty and miserable; and while they repine at the disadvantages under which they labour, their parents must be tormented by their fretfulness,—they may be disgraced by the efforts they are led to make to bring down those who surpass them, and they will regret when it is too late that they had not taught them by their example, as well as by their precepts, the beauty and the sweetness of a benevolent temper, and cultivated in them that gratitude, contentment, and charity, which are far more essential to happiness than all the riches of the world.

3. Some trouble their own houses by their profusion. A profuse expenditure of money may be to the gay and the thoughtless in families highly pleasing, and by others it may be extolled as the indication of a temper noble and generous; but its consequences are often more fatal to the virtue and to the happiness of families than those of avarice. Under the influence

of a luxurious taste, and incapable of relishing the quiet and moderation of ordinary life, some must have frequent and sumptuous entertainments, and will expend in excursions of pleasure the money which was required for purposes more necessary. This profusion is seen with the utmost anxiety and uneasiness by a prudent wife, and by children eagerly looking forward to an establishment in the world, and who see the means of their future comfort thus thoughtlessly wasted. In gratifying this desire for company and entertainments, the rest and sanctity of the Lord's day are often violated, and that sacred time is spent in the hurry of preparation for feasting which their partners wished to devote to the exercises of religion. It is in vain that some of this description assert that they attend on the public ordinances of religion, since they detain so many in their families from the house of God; the feelings which are excited, and the conversation that is carried on in such parties, accord ill with the impressions of the sanctuary; and those offices of domestic piety, so delightful to the good on the evening of a Sabbath, must be disregarded by those who invite others or go themselves to the house of feasting.

In gratifying this desire, improper persons are often introduced into their dwellings, with whom it is neither honourable for them nor safe for their children to be associated. And it may with much propriety be said of such persons, that they inherit the wind, for their business is neglected, their affairs go to ruin, and in poverty, neglect, and degradation, they are left to lament that folly and extravagance which rea-

son was never permitted to check, and which hath terminated all its fair promises in bitterness and misery. Had they lived within their income, and sought for such enjoyments only as frugality allowed, they would have been respected by the wise,—they would have escaped all those uneasy feelings which remorse and debt must produce,—no plague would have come nigh their dwelling, and they would have lived in independence and true comfort.

He knows little of the world who imagines, that by this luxury and profusion he will gain one real friend. The sharers of his hospitality may be loud in their praises of his liberal spirit, and profuse in their offers of service, while his corn, and his wine, and his oil abound, but at the first symptoms of embarrassment in his affairs they will turn from him and pass away; and some of them are generally the loudest and the most acrimonious in their reflections on his folly, and will have the baseness to deny the kindness which they experienced from him, or falsely to insinuate that it was more than repaid.

Some trouble their own houses by squandering money in purchasing articles no way necessary. A taste for what is elegant and ornamental may be wisely gratified by the opulent, and in this way Providence opens a sphere for the ingenuity and labour of many artisans; but such a desire, when indulged by persons in less affluent circumstances, will involve them in difficulties, nay, in ruin. How often is superb furniture sold to pay the debts of the thoughtless and the vain! And often have persons pawned for their support articles for which a price was paid, which swal-

lowed up what ought to have been devoted to the maintenance of their families. Many who have sagacity sufficient to acquire money, want wisdom to spend it: and to use the world without abusing it, is one of the lessons of religion which all should apply themselves to learn and to practise. The wants of nature are few, and the means of supply easy and simple, but those of luxury are numerous, and they cannot be gratified but at an enormous expense.

4. Some trouble their own houses by their vices. The misery that arises to a dwelling, from the wickedness of the head of it, is the most intolerable; other afflictions admit many alleviating reflections, but this admits of none. The partiality of affection may plead that their ebullitions of bad temper were provoked by follies,—that in their avarice they were actuated by a wish to lay up for them, and that in their voluptuous indulgences, they wished to see their families cheerful and mingling in gay society; but for vice and crime no apology can be made, nor dare a virtuous heart invent aught to extenuate the iniquities of those it loves.

The drunkard is the pest of his family. How dreadfully are they shocked when he returns home overcome of wine, and when he, whom they wish to respect, hath degraded himself into an object of disgust! and they are harassed with frequent anxieties, lest, in coming to his dwelling in that state, he should meet with some fatal accident. Such men may be kind and obliging while carousing with their jovial companions, but their manners are very different when they return to their families. Their ill-hu-

mour, so long restrained, is excited by the most trivial causes, and bursts forth in excesses of reproach and abuse. When a wife is enslaved by this habit, the family is the scene of misery and despair, and an object of horror to all around. How dreadfully does he trouble his house, whose affections are alienated from the wife of his bosom, and who leaves his dwelling for the haunts of debauchery! The partner of his house becomes the prey of jealousy, the most tormenting of all the passions; and when his baseness can no longer be doubted, most agonizing are the feelings of insulted tenderness and ill-requited love. She sees the peace of her dwelling irrecoverably gone, and feels, that though she may forgive him who has injured her so grossly, she can never respect nor trust him more. Often does this issue in the utter separation of those who might have lived in the harmony and confidence of affection. The children look on such a father with horror, and though the severity of his demeanour may awe them into silence, he beholds in their looks their abhorrence of his crime, and is conscious that they feel their connexion with him as their misfortune and their disgrace.

The infidelity of the wife is the ruin of domestic peace. Jealousy is the rage of a man, therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. It is a passion cruel as the grave; and when her wickedness is detected, the least punishment she can expect from him, is final expulsion from the mansion she has dishonoured. Her children are taught to consider her as their worst enemy; and the seducer, to whom she has sacrificed her virtue and her peace, soon abandons

her to the solitude, the contempt, and the privations which he vowed to share. Then doth she curse her own folly, in expecting honour or truth in one who could tempt her to violate her vows, and in imagining that aught could compensate to a wife's or a mother's heart, the expressions of her children's tenderness, or the assiduities of a husband's care; and suffers in agonizing remorse and bitter scorn, the punishment of a crime, which, in ruining the happiness of her family, destroyed her own.

The man who commits depredations on the property of others, and who, not contented with what he and his family can earn, puts forth his hand to steal, must be numbered with those who are the troubles of their house. They must be lost to all shame and fear, who can know this and not be miserable. Detection and infamy and death are before them, and what can fill a family with horror, if this will not?

Some trouble their own houses by engaging in unlawful employments. I have chiefly in my eye the practice of smuggling,—a practice very common of late, and of the wickedness of which many entertain very light ideas. They imagine that they are doing wrong to no one,—that they are evading laws which are unreasonable and unjust,—eluding the control of men insolent and rapacious, and that they furnish in this way articles superior to what can be obtained in legitimate traffic. It must be a conscience easily satisfied that will be silenced by such sophistry, or induced by it to think less harshly of a practice which is peculiar to the unprincipled and the desperate.

This is a practice directly opposed to the Divine law, which requires us "to give tribute to whom tribute is due."* The protection afforded us by government in our persons and properties claims from us the payment of taxes needful for its support. The Divine command to honour the king, is very sorrily obeyed by those who applaud him and wish him all prosperity, but who deny him that tribute, without which the rights and the dignity of his crown cannot be supported; and if Christ required the Jews to render to a despot the things that were Cæsar's, can a follower of his refuse this to a righteous and paternal government?

It is a practice most injurious to the fair trader. It is impossible for him to compete with such a rival; were it to prevail, with all his ingenuity and labour, his family must starve; and to him it is in effect the same as if the smuggler rifled his shop and destroyed his goods.

It withdraws a man from the regular duties and habits of industry,—associates him with the audacious and the profligate,—engages him in acts of resistance to lawful authority, in which he can only succeed by the basest fraud, or by bloody violence,—forms his children to practices which will be their disgrace and their ruin,—and often, by the judgment of law, subjects him to fines, imprisonment, and transportation. It is seldom seen that a smuggler dies rich, or has a family regular, sober, and happy. Many a wife has cursed the hour in which a husband first engaged in

* Rom. xiii. 7.

such practices, and has marked it as the period when contentment and sobriety, order and peace, left their dwelling.

Such are some of the ways in which domestic happiness is ruined; and they must know little of the world who imagine that these statements are, in any respect, exaggerated or ungrounded. It is a painful theme to contemplate; but unless evils are exposed, they will neither be forsaken by the guilty, nor avoided by the thoughtless. Families, virtuous and happy, will go home from such a discourse more fervent in their gratitude, and more confirmed in those attachments, tempers, and resolutions, which form and protect their felicity.

I shall conclude the discourse with a few exhortations.

1. I would exhort those who in times past have, in any of these ways, troubled their houses, to act a different part for the future. If you have made yourselves and them unhappy by foolish and bad tempers and conduct, begin and try the effect of an opposite spirit and behaviour, and exercise yourselves to have a conscience void of offence to God and to man. Say not, My habits are too inveterate to be changed; for this language proves that you are not willing to change them. Know ye not the power of divine grace, and how it hath triumphed, in numerous instances, over the most violent opposition. Lift up your voices, then, to God in earnest entreaty that he would incline your hearts to his testimonies; submit your whole soul in all its powers, feelings, and habits, to his renovating influence; and, instead of the fury, the noise, and the devastation of the whirl-

wind, there will be a delightful calm, in which you will rest in your lot, and find that godliness with charity is joy unspeakable. Domestic felicity is delightful to families which have always enjoyed it; but it must awaken emotions peculiarly sweet in those which have been formerly miserable. How sweet is the peace and the order of virtue, where before there was envying and strife, confusion, and every evil work! and how delightful are the pleasures of devotion and the communion of saints, where the song of the drunkard and the jest of the scorner were heard! "When the jailer at Philippi was converted, he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house;"* and the tyrant of the prison and of his dwelling became the comfort and the blessing of both.

2. Let me exhort those who have been the blessings of their houses, to abound more and more in that meekness, sobriety, industry, and kindness which have filled their dwellings with so much comfort. It is our duty to persevere in the exercise of those virtues which may subject us to painful feelings and sacrifices, and the blessed result of which can only be expected in a future world; and what excuse can we make for desisting from the practice of those graces which bless the heart in all their actings?

Acknowledge your obligations to the grace of God, which has enabled you to act a part so wise for yourselves and so happy for your dwellings. Every man that knows himself feels that there are principles within him which would have led him to a very

* Acts xvi. 34.

different conduct if they had not been subdued by divine power; and that meekness, benevolence, truth, and self-denial, are not the spontaneous produce of the human heart. Never, for one moment, envy those of another spirit. They may have a more splendid dwelling, but what is splendour without peace?—Jovial crowds may flock to it, but friendship rules in no heart there. They may lean upon their house, but it shall not stand,—they may hold it fast, but it shall not endure. They may lay up gold as the dust, but the rust of it shall witness against them. Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way; for when the wicked flourish, it is that they may be destroyed for ever. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."* The influence of your example may contribute much to promote domestic felicity around you. As men pass by your dwelling and hear in it the harmonies of charity and devotion, they will say, "Behold, how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"† It is fragrant like the sacred ointment, and refreshing like the dew of Hermon.

Finally. Let me call on members of families to attend to the duties which this subject suggests to them. Are any of you placed under persons who trouble their own houses? do what you can, by mild and seasonable expostulation, to convince them of the impropriety and the danger of their conduct; and implore for them the influence of that grace which

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* Psalm xxxvii. 3. † Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

can effectually change both the demeanour and the heart. In praying for their amendment, you will feel the virtuous principles and emotions of your own hearts strengthened, and the idea of your pious interest in their welfare will soften them into feelings favourable to goodness. Reprove every appearance of evil; and never let your virtuous disapprobation be diminished by the fair colourings with which they may exhibit their plans, and the artful pretexts which they may suggest for their bad conduct. Yield not, in one instance, your sanction to what is wrong; for this will defeat every future remonstrance of virtuous fidelity. Do every thing in your power to counteract the influence of their temper and conduct on your dwelling; and the more violent, avaricious, or profuse they are, be you the more active in putting on meekness, in a prudent economy, and in a well-directed charity.

And let those who are placed in families where the heads of it are a blessing to their dwelling, be deeply sensible of their privilege, and never give them the least uneasiness. Give not a pang to those who live to make you happy, nor trouble those who would brave the blast of calamity to shelter you. Cultivate the amiable qualities by which they bless their households, and apply to that Spirit of grace to whom they are indebted for all that is excellent and lovely, to work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Then, when you are placed in families of your own, you will walk within your houses with a perfect heart, and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Amen.

DISCOURSE X.

ON THE MISCONDUCT OF CHILDREN, AND ITS BITTER FRUITS IN FAMILIES.

PROV. xix. 26. *He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach.*

THIS same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed, was the pleasing expectation expressed by Lamech at the birth of Noah; and such hath been the hope of many parents. Fancy delights to paint the future character and fate of children in the brightest colours; and the efforts and the sacrifices which are made by their parents for their happiness, seem to entitle them to conclude that to their offspring nothing shall be dearer than a father and a mother's peace. If, in one instance, their hopes are disappointed, they flatter themselves that they will be more fortunate in others; and whatever mortifications they may experience from the folly, the caprice, the insolence, and the enmity of others, they imagine, that in the wisdom and the steadiness, the submission and the love of their children, they will find credit in all their misfortunes, and aid in all their struggles. Yet it is from children that their bitterest griefs have arisen, and the pangs of disappointment have been as

agonizing as their hopes were sweet.—In these cases, they are apt to consider themselves as blameless,—to ascribe this unhappy result to the carelessness of those to whom their education has been intrusted,—to the companions with whom they associated,—and to the connexions which they formed ; to these causes it may in part be owing, but the censure of the world, the voice of conscience, more impartial than it, and even the upbraidings of the young eager to turn away from their own heads part of the abuse directed to it, will tell them that blame attaches to themselves from their defective management ; and this consciousness is so far from alleviating the distress, that it adds to it the anguish of remorse.

Having, in a former discourse, pointed out those sources of domestic misery which are to be found in the conduct of heads of families, I shall, from this text, point out those which originate in the behaviour of children ; and may the dark picture stimulate the diligence and extend the care of parents, and guard the young from every thing which, by wounding them, destroys their own felicity.

1. The young may grieve their parents by inattention to instruction. Parents consider it as their duty to give to children all that knowledge which they can communicate, and to procure for them that education by others, which is necessary for their improvement and success in life. This impression is more prevalent in this country than in any other ; it is found operating in the poorest classes, and has contributed to produce that intelligence and activity

by which its lowest orders have been marked, and which has, in distant regions, called forth the loudest applause on the spirit and the institutions of Scotland.

Yet they often find all their efforts fruitless. To the minds of some children knowledge hath no charms; the lesson prescribed is unheeded, and the spirits of parents are exhausted in vain attempts to clothe the barren sands in verdure. Some deprive themselves of many comforts that they may give to their children a respectable education, and the scanty meal is cheered by the hope that their obscurity will be brightened by their attaining the distinctions of the successful scholar. Nor is this to be laughed at as mere vanity and folly; for the annals of literature present instances in abundance in which genius hath immortalized the humblest name, and fame hath shed its glory over the peasant's cottage and grave. But in too many instances that time is wasted in amusement which parents imagined was spent at wisdom's gates, and they are mortified in finding, that their money has been thrown away,—that they have put a price into the hand of a fool to get wisdom, to which he has no heart,—and that others, far less favoured, are crowned with knowledge. To see their son a scholar has been the proudest hope of many of the industrious, and to realize this they have made many sacrifices, yet a dunce or a trifler is the only character acquired; and their disappointment, instead of exciting pity, subjects them to the ridicule of the envious and the unfeeling.

Let not this sad result render any of you indifferent about the education of your families, but let it

induce you to check the first indication of trifling; and, instead of urging them to prosecute parts of learning for which they have no relish, and in which there is no likelihood they will ever excel, let them be directed and encouraged in those in which your acquaintance with them will soon point out to you that they will probably make proficiency. Let them not hear you repining at the money it costs you; and know this, that a respectable education is one of the high favours for which they will bless your memory, and that many have lost situations in life in which they would have been respected and happy, on account of that limited education with which they were sent away from their father's house. The petulance of the novice will harass you, and the folly of the brutish will degrade you, but a wise son will honour you by his respect, and devote his best acquirements to serve you.

2. Disobedience in children will make their parents unhappy. The God of nature hath invested parents with authority over their children; and the reasonableness and the advantages of this are so obvious, that they are seen and felt among the rudest tribes. It is not an arrangement which owes its existence to the influence of science, nor is it one which is only visible when civilization hath improved the manners, but in barbarous nations, where the fiercest passions rage, and pride tramples down every obstacle in its way to superiority, the claims of a parent are felt in the savage heart, and to his will the most determined purpose will bend. A child left to his own humour will hurry on to destruction. Impelled by

passion, with no guide but folly, and free from all the restraints of parental authority, he would soon terminate in ruin, a course which, while it lasted, was injurious to others and disgraceful to himself.—The young must be placed under the constant inspection and government of others; and with none can the control of them be so safely lodged for their true interest as with parents that love them so tenderly, and are so solicitous for their welfare.

There may be injunctions of parents which ought to be disobeyed on account of their opposition to the will of the Great Lord of all; yet it is seldom that their commands are of this cast, and most commonly they are of such a nature that to obey them is not only the duty but the interest of the young.

Yet to these commands it sometimes happens that no regard is paid, and entreaties and threats are employed in vain to secure compliance. Obedience is promised, but it only adds falsehood to disregard of their will. There have been cases in which intimations of a parent's will have been received with audacious mockery, and their threatened displeasure has been defied and scorned. Such a conduct must crush the hearts of parents: and some, worn out by a vain struggle with the stubborn and the rebellious, have thrown the reins upon their necks, and left them to walk in their own counsels. Such ungovernable spirits will soon find, that the safety of the community requires that they be subjected to restraints which they cannot shake off; and often do they, amidst the rigours of military discipline, or in the

chains of a prison, learn to lament their rebellion against a parent's mild authority.

There was one of the laws given to ancient Israel which shews how rebellious children produce misery in families which becomes at length intolerable, even to parents. "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them; then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place: and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."* Modern laws leave such offenders to be expelled from the dwellings of parents, and disinherited at their pleasure, and do not interfere in punishing them unless in cases which are very atrocious, and where the public peace is broken by their outrages;—but this commandment shows how enormous such a crime is in the sight of God, and that it shall be punished by him with awful severity.

To prevent such disobedience let parents labour to gain the affections of their children; and let them govern their families, not by terror, but by love.—Let them see that your commands are reasonable,

* Deut. xxi. 18—21.

and dictated by a regard to their comfort as well as your own, and that you are not influenced by caprice, or a wish to thwart or oppress them.

3. The happiness of parents may be injured by their children's waste of their substance. Children have an undoubted right to a support and education suited to the circumstances of their parents, but it is not for these alone that the fruits of their toil are sometimes claimed. From their instability of disposition, the young become anxious to change the employment to which they wished once to be devoted, further expenses must be incurred to place them in new situations; and at the time when parents expected they should have been able to maintain themselves respectably, they find them a heavier burden than ever. To prevent this, beware of placing them in employments which they dislike, or in those the mere novelty of which may charm them, and with which you have reason to think a little experience will disgust them. Let the one selected be suited to their temper and habits,—let such encouragement be given to their efforts in it as will induce them to persevere,—and let their attention be directed to those examples of steady and successful activity in that business which will rouse their emulation.

Some young persons waste the substance of their parents in vicious indulgences. What was earned by the sweat of their brow is squandered in gambling and drunkenness. It is an excellent mean to prevent the young from having recourse to pernicious amusement abroad, to make them happy at home. From a cheerful fireside they have seldom a wish to stray;

and where their comfort is studied by an affectionate and provident care, they will feel no inclination to seek the gratifications of unlawful pleasure.

Sometimes, also, the young engage in commercial speculations, which they vainly imagine will load them with riches, the credit of their parents is staked in the wild adventure, and the money is embarked which they had laid up for their support in old age, or for the education and establishment of the younger part of their families; and by mismanagement, or by the impracticability of the project, it must be relinquished, with this tremendous aggravation of failure, that their all is swallowed in that gulf in which so many hopes and fortunes have perished. They amuse their parents for a while with specious plans and assurances, and buoy them up with the most delusive ideas of extensive success, till their ruin leaves them without money and without hope, and impresses on the bankrupt this horrid distinction among the crowd of debtors, that he has made his father a beggar. To guard against this, let parents examine carefully every scheme in which they are urged to participate; let them solicit the advice of men of information and experience, and let no flatteries nor entreaties induce them to sanction any thing that is imprudent; and even where the scheme is most plausible, and where it meets with general approbation, let them risk no more in it than they can lose without injury to their own comfort and the claims of others.

Sometimes, also, it has been necessary for parents to part with their property to save the young from the punishment of their misconduct; and some have

found that, when they have sacrificed their all for the security of a prodigal son, a new act of villany has plunged him in infamy and ruin, from which they could make no effort to relieve him. If there be a criminal unworthy of pity, it must be such a wretch as this, who, though saved from destruction by the sacrifice of a father's all, rushed again into the paths of the destroyer.

4. Contentions and disputes among the members of families destroy the happiness of parents. The evil passions of the human heart often produce bitter envying and strife where we might have supposed unbroken cordiality would dwell. Disputes in families are often not the mere result of childish petulance and folly, which advancing wisdom will effectually repress, for they are sometimes carried on with all the virulence and pertinacity of determined malice.—Envy at the real or fancied superiority of another,—interference with their favourite plans and measures,—opposition in the pursuits in which they are keenly engaged,—dislike to the companions with whom they associate, are some of the causes of these feuds; and it is a melancholy fact, that the more frequent such strifes are, they are conducted with increasing ferocity; and that the kind affections are left after such struggles with less influence than before to control the evil tempers of the heart. Contentions of this kind are most distressing to parents from the discredit which they bring on their families, from the interruption which they give to the quiet and the comfort of their dwellings, from their dread of the unhappy consequences in which they may issue, and from their

apprehension of the horrible extremities to which children may carry their feuds when they are no longer alive to restrain them. The language of abuse, and the stroke of violence, are a blow on a parent's heart. A person can bear the buffetings of the tempest, the opposition and strivings of the world, if he knows that all is peace and love at home; but if discord frets and howls and rages there, he finds himself utterly wretched. If, instead of witnessing among the members of his family the delightful reciprocations of gentleness and love, he finds them, in spite of his most solemn dissuasives, bent on rendering evil for evil, and railing for railing, he will think that his last and best resource for earthly happiness hath failed, and will feel, that in the death which releases him from such society, he must part with them in the utmost fear and shame.

To prevent this misery, let parents maintain entire harmony betwixt themselves,—let them inculcate the beauty and the pleasures of peace and concord, and remove, as quickly as possible, every thing that threatens to produce alienation or division in their dwellings,—let their arrangements respecting the support, education, and establishment of their children be formed with justice and impartiality, and let them implore those influences of divine grace which can produce, in the circles where they operate, one heart and one way. Such efforts for peace will, in the most of cases, be effectual; and where they do fail, conscience will not mingle its reproach with the clamours of discord.

5. Children ruin the happiness of their parents by

connecting themselves with wicked companions. They to companions often possess qualities which fascinate the young, or, if they want these, they artfully assume the language and the guise of them, in order to gain their affection and to secure their confidence. It is generally by slow degrees that they open to them their nefarious schemes, and when they imagine they are so fully in their power that they cannot recede. Sometimes they attach themselves to persons of loose principles, by whom they are taught to contemn all those views of religion and morality which their parents laboured with such diligence to form, to seek their own pleasure on the Sabbath, and to scoff at the services of the Christian church as the burdensome ceremonies of a degrading superstition. How dreadful is it to a serious parent to behold that Gospel thus rejected, which is to him the power of God to salvation, and which suggests to him his best consolation and his only hope! The young have been taught by infidel associates to view religious parents as enthusiasts, and to consider themselves as too enlightened and liberal to be any longer duped by the tales of the nursery, or the mummeries of priestcraft. The cavils and the scoffs of infidelity excite a peculiar horror when they come from such lips. There have been parents whose religious principles have been unhinged by the arts of such children, and who, in the agonies of their last hour, have felt that they had ruined a hope which they could not supply, rejected a consolation which they cannot recall, and scorned a vengeance which they cannot endure.

Some too are corrupted in their practice by wicked

companions. Some are allured to the haunts of debauchery, others are enticed to join in deeds of mischief and depredation, and others are persuaded to sit down with the drunkard, and are taught to glory in excesses, which they once regarded as disgraceful to human nature, and to despise every rational and virtuous enjoyment. It is impossible to describe the misery which parents feel when they suspect that the young are thus entangled by evil men, and the horror that overwhelms them when they find their suspicions confirmed, and the children of their hearts become the slaves of sin. Tears as bitter as those which they shed when they were first awakened gush from their eyes, and they feel they cannot be happy till they are brought to repentance.

Some wicked children die in their sins, and under the power of infidel principles, and none can describe the agony of a parent's heart in seeing them unaffected with their guilt and danger, and driven away in their wickedness, parting with them for ever, and in laying them in a grave, at whose side hope cannot whisper one word of consolation. This is misery by which the bones are dried and the heart is broken.

To prevent such misery, let parents exhibit to their children the evidences of the Christian system, and its beauty and excellence; and if their attachment to it is founded on such convictions, it will not be shaken by infidel abuse. If they can say no more for their principles, than that they form the creed of their country, and were the lessons of their childhood, they will soon be perplexed by difficulties for which they have not been prepared, and laughed out of a hope

for which they can give no reason. Teach them to be cautious in the choice of their companions, to prefer the solid and improving qualities before those which are amusing and showy, and instantly to break up the friendship which is leading them to the appearance of evil.

6. Unkind usage from children sometimes afflicts the hearts of parents. Their unreasonable complaints and harsh reflections must be heard by parents with pain. When there is any ground for these in the imprudence of their conduct, it is grieving to hear the language of severe censure from those from whom they had reason to expect indulgence, or at least candour; and where there is no cause for them, it is exasperating to be blamed for misfortunes which could not be foreseen, and for not doing more for children, for whom perhaps they have already done too much.

It sometimes happens that parents are brought to a state of dependence on children, and what they give them is bestowed in a manner so sullen and reluctant, that it is dire necessity which compels them to receive it. The pang which unkindness gives us, is always proportioned to the degree of our claim to opposite treatment, and those who could have borne in silence the neglect of a stranger, or the violence of an enemy, feel, that to be deemed a burden by the children whom they nourished and brought up, is insupportable. Nay, the conduct of some children has been such to their parents, that they have felt themselves obliged to leave their dwellings, and to cast themselves on the bounty of strangers. Some have cast out from their dwellings, as intolerable burdens, the parents whom they ought

to have nourished in their most commodious apartments, and left them to languish on the scanty pittance of public charity. Such persons must be abhorred by every heart that is not as base as their own. And were the public indignation directed against such persons, and were they shunned and detested as they ought to be, it would make such outrages on nature and humanity less frequent.

It is a very striking fact, that the children who have been guilty of treating parents with cruelty, have been those whom they idolized, and to whom they shewed the most indiscreet indulgence. Indiscreet partiality, and injudicious affection, renders the object of it vain, selfish, and insolent; he becomes accustomed to regard his own gratification as the only thing worthy of his care, and the fondness which can no longer minister to it he will scorn. From petulant humour he rises by degrees to deeds of cruelty. Amidst all the evils of the world the stab goes deepest which comes from such a hand. Some of those who have received outcast parents, and gloried to devote the best chambers of their dwellings to be their asylum, have been treated in their early years with neglect, and had their advantages abridged to enlarge those of the favourite. What a triumph of generous feeling is exhibited in their conduct! and with admiration it is regarded by grateful and happy parents, and by that Saviour whose spirit it so nobly displays.

To prevent the ill usage of children, let parents act in such a manner as to secure the respect as well as the love of their offspring; let them labour to repress the malignant passions in their hearts, to cultivate that

gratitude, meekness, and kindliness, which will render their conduct and manners sweet and obliging, and let them on no account subject themselves to that dependence which may be abused. Retain the control of your property while you live, for it is the order of nature that they should look up to you, and not that you should bend to them.

This subject suggests various exhortations.

1. Let the young, who have been guilty of any of these offences against parents, be persuaded to repent. Consider how odious your conduct is in the estimation of all those whose opinion is entitled to your respect, and how impossible it is for you to vindicate it to your own consciences. It may be long since you heard the voice of conscience, and since it ceased to trouble you ; but if you embrace not this opportunity of rousing it to its duty, and following the mandates of Heaven, it will speak to you in a short time in language far more severe than any human censure, and in reproaches which must be heard in shame and terror. Remember, that soon your parents shall be taken from you, and you shall then wish, in the bitterest anguish of spirit, that you had made them happy ; that eye will cease to flow for your unkindness, that face to redden at your audacity, and that heart to throb with terror at your danger. Death will release them from all their sufferings, and then it will be vain for you to wish that you had acted otherwise, or to attempt to repair the wrongs you did them. That heart will be bound up, but not by you, and these tears wiped away, but by another hand than yours O catch the present opportunity of blessing your best

friends ere they go hence and are no more, and nought shall remain of them but their curse; and it is the heaviest, next to the Almighty's! There is no enjoyment which that curse cannot embitter, and there is no refuge into which it cannot penetrate. While you are wretched, they shall enjoy a happiness which it shall be impossible for you to disturb, and which cannot be marred, either by pity or by fear for you.

Consider that it is highly probable that the Almighty will punish you, by permitting your children to treat you as you have treated your parents, and then you will feel the pangs you once inflicted, and say, while the heart is bleeding under agonies which the world will not pity, and of which conscience will not suffer you to complain, "As I have done, so hath the Lord requited me."

As your conduct is most wicked, it will meet with its due punishment in the world of misery. Arise then and go to earthly parents, and to your Father in heaven, with thespirit and language of the prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;" and prove your sincerity by works meet for repentance.

2. Let children who are a happiness to parents be more diligent than ever in those works which bless them. Be more attentive to their counsels, more submissive to their will, more careful of their substance, and more kind in your manner to them than ever. Such conduct will be most honourable to yourselves, and will add to the happiness of your parents. If declining life increases their infirmities, let them find corresponding consolation in your growing care. If

they can do little for their support, you must impart the more. If their strength is so small that they can move but with difficulty, they will lean more heavily upon you. Your reading to them must be extended as their eyes become dim, and your suggestions be repeated when memory fails. Fret not on account of their moans, which shall soon be silent in the grave, and wipe with unwearied tenderness the tears from those eyes which you shall soon close for ever.

Do what you can, you can never repay what you owe them for their care of your infancy, and their guidance of your youth. They will leave you their blessing, and you will find its efficacy in the pleasing reflections of your own minds, and in the smiles of Providence. You may be blessed with children as eager for your happiness as you have been for theirs. And in the world to come they shall glorify God in you, and you shall meet them in that family of Heaven, where no member can be a grief to another, where love influences every feeling, and joy blesses every moment.

Finally, Let parents be instructed in their duty by this subject. Let those whose happiness has been marred by their children be humbled for those faults in their temper and conduct, which have emboldened them to treat you in this manner; and by reflecting on your unworthy conduct to your Father in heaven, you will feel that you are chastened less than your iniquities deserve. Persevere in the use of all proper methods to reclaim them, and do not despair of success, for some incident may alarm, and some counsel may persuade them. Let this disappointment in the

creature lead you to seek more earnestly your happiness in God. His love can cheer the heart that bleeds over a child's unkindness, and unite you to objects which will never give you a single pang.

Let parents who are happy in kind, virtuous, and obedient children, bless God for such a privilege. The miseries which others have felt will impress you with your felicity. These arms that support you might have been stretched out to thrust you away; that voice, which speaks to you in the softest tones of love, might have cursed you, and that heart, which now feels your sorrows as much as its own, might have been to you as the heart of a stranger or of a foe. Be more assiduous than ever in contributing to your children's happiness, and let the delightful contest betwixt you be, who shall do most to make each other holy and blessed. While thus happy in one another, pray for the families which are strangers to your temper and consolations, and that God may pour out his spirit and his blessing upon them, so that instead of the thorn the olive shall spring up, and instead of the brier the myrtle-tree; and that this may be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off.

DISCOURSE XI.

LESSONS FOR CONVERSATION.

PROVERBS xxxi. 26.—*She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness.*

THE picture drawn in this chapter is in the highest degree beautiful and striking. It is easy to trace through the oriental figures with which it is embellished, that benignity of manners, that vigilant economy, that unremitted activity, that sagacity of mind, that solicitude for the respectability and comfort of her family, and that uniform propriety of conduct, which render the mistress of a house at once its ornament and its blessing. To this pattern, all who are placed in such circumstances should labour to be conformed; and it would be happy for society if those who are employed in forming the characters of such as are destined to take the charge of families kept it in view in all their lessons. Whenever the system of education shall become too wise for the doctrines, too refined for the language, and too liberal for the forms and the restraints of religion, we may be assured that the destruction of all that is estimable in character is nigh; and it becomes the friends of Christianity to encourage by their countenance the tuition, which is animated by its spirit, and which aims at the culture of its graces.

In this character there is nothing frivolous or vain,

but all is substantial excellence, and all is adapted for comfort and utility. There is no lesson for the ceremonies of fashionable life, or the sports of a foolish gayety, but all is directed to the best qualities of domestic management, and to that prudence and kindness which impart happiness to many a lowly dwelling, where wealth never blazed, and where external accomplishments were never cultivated.

It is upon one part of the character that I am now o discourse, and I shall endeavour to set before you those qualities in conversation by which the wise and the good are distinguished, and which the law of God requires from persons of both sexes, and of every age and condition.

I. Let us consider, in the first place, what it is to open the mouth with wisdom.

1. It is to be well acquainted with the subjects on which we speak. Many talk on subjects of which they are utterly ignorant, and thus expose themselves to the ridicule of their associates, and are confounded by objections and difficulties of which they were not aware. Many of our politicians are chargeable with this presumption, and in general the dogmatism and the rancour of their discourse is in proportion to their ignorance. This also is the case with many infidels; they have never studied the religion they condemn, and their invectives are directed against a scheme which they have disfigured by the unshapely additions of their own prejudice, and the dark colours furnished by their own malignity.

Many are accustomed to talk of the schemes of

others, about which they are not correctly informed and sometimes censure as unjust, extravagant, and objects practicable, what deserves a completely opposite character; and actions, of the motives of which we know nothing, are often condemned where they are entitled to our high applause. You must all have seen the shame and confusion which have covered those whose rash and uncharitable judgments are exposed in the course of events, and it becomes them to learn, from such painful feelings, that prudence and caution which are the dictates of a candid mind and of a virtuous heart.

It is highly proper that we should be well furnished by reading, observation, and experience, before we talk much, and that we should be influenced more by a wish to learn than by a desire to dazzle others by the extent of our acquirements. Modest silence will interest others in your favour, and "even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace."* Never go beyond your depth is a maxim, the prudence and the safety of which are indisputable.

2. To open our mouths with wisdom is to direct our conversation to subjects important and useful. Instead of engrossing it by the gossiping which details every idle story in circulation, by the satire which exposes the follies of others, not to reform them, but to gratify the malignity of the satirist, or by the humour which stirs up successive bursts of laughter, as if we met to be amused, but not improved, it becomes us to have our speech for the use of edifying, that it may

* Proverbs xvii. 28.

minister grace to the hearers. There is no topic which can be introduced which does not suggest something of this cast.

The difficulties of the times, and their influence on the toils and comforts of families, are themes on which some expatiate at great length; but the wise on such occasions should point out the motives which call us to gratitude and contentment, and that self-denial and humiliation which become us under Jehovah's frowns.

The increase of the poor is another frequent subject of conversation; and on this the wise will avoid the bitter invectives of the hard-hearted on the indolence and the profligacy of the indigent, and the pernicious cant of those who talk of charity as a passport to heaven. Let us talk of the best methods of relieving the poor, without paralyzing industry, and of those principles which will improve their habits. Where the poor have seen better days, their fall suggests most salutary warnings on the instability of the world; and where beggary is the result of the neglect which they experienced in early life, it should lead us to point out the importance of a virtuous education, and the necessity of caring for the desolate and the helpless.

The subject of religion should be more frequently introduced than it is. It must be owing to a strong dislike to religion, that, while every other subject is welcomed, or at least tolerated, the introduction of this is ascribed to hypocrisy or enthusiasm. But the man that feels its value, and who knows the peril of their state who live without God in the world, will seize every fit opportunity of exhibiting the truth and blessings of Christianity, and will speak of the excel-

lence of its doctrines, the purity of its laws, and the power of its consolations. When the various sects into which the Christian world is divided are referred to, it becomes the wise to shew from these the necessity of forbearance.

If the vices of its professors are alluded to, the wise will point out the wonders it has wrought in improving the moral state of society, and the injustice of condemning it for the offences of hypocrites.

When religion is talked of, the controversies which have been agitated among its professed friends are usually brought forward; and in such cases it may be profitable to expose the bad passions in which many of them have originated and been conducted; to shew the care which our Redeemer has manifested, in guarding his truth from being perverted by error, or suppressed by violence, and to recommend that meekness and humility, which guide the feet in the ways of peace.

In a word, it must be our aim in conversation to make others wiser and better; not to amuse them for an hour, but to send them away with those views and impressions which will have a permanent moral influence over them, and this will point it to subjects by which the careless may be roused, the ignorant enlightened, and the profane reformed.

3. It is to have our conversation regulated by a proper regard to our company. You will not suppose that my meaning in this statement is, that we are to adapt our discourse to the folly or the wickedness of others; for we must put such persons to shame by sharp reproof or by expressive silence. Let it not be

supposed, that, by going with them to the utmost limits of propriety, you will conciliate their good-will, and incline them to listen with readiness to the words of truth and soberness; for you will find that the change of your tone and subject will only sharpen their sarcasms and increase their profanity; while the early and well-directed expression of your dislike would have impressed them with the belief of your sincerity and consistency, and thus inclined their ears to your counsels. It is my wish, in this statement, to shew that we should mark well the characters of those before whom we speak, that what we say may be calculated to do them good, and that nothing may be uttered which may tend to their prejudice.

In the presence of the young it is unwise to talk, in a gloomy strain, of our fears and struggles in religion, lest we disgust them at that which might otherwise engage their affection. Let us speak of the blissful feelings which are produced by the exercise of its graces, of the strength which it gives to every generous purpose, and of its power to fortify the mind in the prospect of those events, at the thought of which nature shudders, and under the terrors of which the help of man is vain.

In the presence of the afflicted, jocular conversation is an insult to their grief. There is a morbid gloom which may be dispelled by the mirth of a cheerful companion; but it is by the comforts of the Gospel, and the sympathy of its gentle and compassionate spirit, that the broken heart is healed, and the trembling soul is delivered from all its fears.

In the presence of those who are only setting out

on the way to Zion, it is unwise to insinuate the difficulties and objections which may stagger us, lest we cover with a cloud the minds which are filled with joy and peace in believing. Let us mention these at first only to those who may be able to give us proper counsel; and when we speak of them afterwards, let us connect with them the answers by which our minds were relieved.

In the presence of the aged let us not talk of the follies of the scene from which they have retired, unless we have reason to suspect that they are looking back to them with a wishful eye; but let us set before them the unfading beauty of Christian excellence, the solemn stillness of the evening of life, and that total detachment from all that is worldly which becomes those whose next step shall bring them to the chambers of death.

When we are in company with those who are more intelligent than ourselves, it becomes us to hear from them what may improve us, and not to tease them by telling them that with which they are much better acquainted than we are.

In company with strangers it is peculiarly necessary that we should be cautious as to what we say, lest, by free remarks on the characters, the principles, or the connexions of individuals, we wound the feelings of any who are present, and expose ourselves to that painful embarrassment which is felt by persons when they are apprised who have been the hearers of their indiscreet abuse. Let us take heed that we say nothing of the absent but what we could repeat and justify in their presence.

4. It is to have our conversation suited to the season. In the house of mourning, it is most unwise to talk, as is too often done, of the news of the district to which it belongs, and to dispute about public affairs. And nothing shews more clearly the stupidity and impiety of the human heart than this, that by the side of the dead the sports of amusement have been seen, and the roar of mirth heard. Amidst our anxiety, in this country, to avoid the superstitions of other countries at funerals, we have stript them of almost every thing adapted to impress the warnings of death upon the heart; and the crowds which have been collected, and the entertainments given at meetings of this nature, have impeded every thing that is serious in reflection or discourse, and sent men to a neighbour's grave without a single purpose of preparation for their own.

On the Lord's day, the world should be banished from our conversation as well as from our thoughts; and to talk of its business, its cares, or its pleasures, is to render of none effect all the lessons which we have received from the voice which speaks to us from heaven. When we return from the gates of Zion, how little is said of what has been heard, in comparison of what has been seen! The public notices of a secular nature, which are so often read or pasted up on churches, are strong temptations to worldly conversation, which few are able to resist; and it is much to be wished that some other mode were adopted of giving such intimations, rather than one which profanes God's sanctuary, and forces upon the minds of worshippers objects which withdraw them from the

things which ought to occupy their undivided and their utmost attention.

At sacramental solemnities we ought to direct our conversation to the decease which was accomplished at Jerusalem; and we offer a gross indignity to the cross of Christ, when we turn from it to the trifles of the world, and rob of those sacred hours due to it a theme worthy of the study, the wonder, and the praise of eternity.

In seasons of public calamity the wise will speak of the causes of the Lord's controversy; in the day of prosperity we should consider one another to provoke to love and to good works; in periods of misfortune, when fretfulness vents itself in murmurs, and pride despises the chastening of the Lord, we should express from the heart the sentiments of resignation; and in a dying hour, while speech remains, let it be employed in supplication to God, and admonition to our friends.

II. I proceed, in the second place, to shew what it is to have on the tongue the law of kindness.

1. It intimates that the good employ, on all fit occasions, the language of sympathy, encouragement, and candour. There are some who delight to aggravate the misfortunes of others by harsh reflections, and to plunge them in despair by representing their misery as irremediable. The three friends of Job acted in this manner, and their representations display much ignorance of the ways of Providence, and a great want of candour in judging of him whom they called their friend. But the good express the com-

passionate interest which they take in the sorrows of others, and labour, by the soothing voice of religious comfort, to inspire resignation and hope. Every bright spot in their condition they will carefully point out to them, and those feelings of irritation and envy by which misfortunes are so much embittered they will labour to repress.

Instead of a flat refusal to assist the unfortunate in bettering their circumstances, the good promise such aid as it is in their power to give; and they do not act like those who say, "Depart in peace, be ye clothed, be ye warmed, be ye filled, while they give them not those things which are needful for the body;"* for the kindness of their deeds always accompanies that of their language. A promise to the unhappy is peculiarly sacred, and the violation of it is not merely an act of fraud, but of cruelty.

There are some who take up an ill report against others without examining into its truth, and circulate it with a malignant assiduity; and where others have acted improperly, they will talk of their faults in the harshest language. But the good abhor the tale of slander; they will state every circumstance that occurs to them which renders the accusation improbable; and where the offence is certain, they will suggest every consideration by which it is extenuated, and by which others may be led to watchfulness and prayer. To the offender himself they will speak, not in the language which exasperates and hardens, but in that which melts the heart. There is a strain

* James ii. 18.

of expostulation, of entreaty, and of counsel, which Christian compassion and zeal dictates, which can be resisted only by the most obdurate, and which will be repelled only by the utterly depraved. The noblest examples of this eloquence are to be found in the discourses of our Lord, and the strongest encouragement to follow it is to be found in the trophies of his grace.

2. The expression implies that the good excite others to acts of kindness. There are some who oppose every scheme of benevolence. When any plan of this kind is suggested, they will insinuate something either against the object or its supporters, or assert that it is unnecessary or unseasonable. Many of the noblest plans which human mercy ever formed have been opposed, not merely by the selfish and the avaricious, but by the bigot as inconsistent with his favourite rites and modes, by the politician as dangerous to existing establishments, and by the disputers of this world as rank enthusiasm. But the good, having examined the plans which are presented for their support, and approving of them as necessary, judicious, and benevolent, recommend them to the countenance of others by their tendency to promote the comfort and improvement of man, the glory of our Redeemer, and the happiness of those who patronize them. They will correct misrepresentations of their nature and design, and labour to remedy the defects which prevent their acceptance or impede their success.

The present age is marked by the active exertions of females in forming and supporting institutions of piety and mercy ; and they have conducted them with

a wisdom and an energy highly creditable to their principles, their sagacity, and their feeling, and which leads us to regret that so potent an auxiliary in the work of the Lord was not sooner called forth into action. From the splendid scenes of rank and fashion, females go to relieve and instruct the poor, and to comfort the feeble-minded; and in the humblest walks of life a compassion operates, which labours to interest neighbours in behalf of the sick and the desolate, and whose appeals, expressed in the simple eloquence of truth and feeling, are seldom heard with indifference. Its voice doth not prescribe, but supplicate; and every instance of its success excites a pleasurable emotion, which amply repays the toils and pains of its labours of love.

The good will also recommend the deserving to the patronage of those who are able to bring them forward, and will labour to interest those in the cause of the unhappy who may be able to give them effectual relief. They will employ such arguments as, from their situation and character, are likely to influence them, and strive to remove those prejudices which might restrain the hand of the bountiful, though it should require long and patient exertion.

3. The expression implies the benignity and sweetness of the manner in which the good employ the language of kindness. Some advise others to what is right, but it is in so imperious a manner that it is rejected with scorn. The persons advised cannot believe that a counsel delivered in such a manner can be dictated by any wish for their good, but consider it as an interference in their affairs which has no other

object than to trample upon, to insult, and to expose them. The rejection of the advice may be ascribed solely to their folly, but the adviser's manner must bear part of the blame.

Some speak comfort to others, but it is in a manner so careless or so rough, that they are indeed miserable comforters. It is cruel to insist longer than is necessary for the purposes of penitence and amendment on those follies of the unfortunate which have involved them in misery, or to blame them because they cannot at once receive the offered consolation.

But where the law of kindness dwells, the manner of discourse will be sweet and pleasing. Equally remote from the sternness of philosophy and the haughtiness of pharisaism, their speech will drop like the rain and distil like the dew. "Their lips drop as the honeycomb, and honey and milk are under their tongue." Advice is given in such a manner as shews that no sinister motive influences them in the counsel; and while consolation is spoken, the voice softens and the eye flows. Whatsoever things are lovely, the disciple of Jesus is bound to exemplify.*

Let it not be thought that manner is a thing of no importance, and that, because this suavity is sometimes employed to cover the plots of the hypocrite and the designs of the flatterer, bluntness and coarseness are a surer token of sincerity; for courtesy doubles a favour, while rudeness checks the feelings of rising gratitude.

4. This expression points out the dignity which

* Phil. iv. 8.

guards the language of kindness from every thing that is weak and contemptible. It consists not in those familiar phrases, by the use of which persons render themselves less respectable, nor in those fondling epithets which are strong indications that those who employ them have not yet put away childish things. The man who speaks in this manner may be talked of as possessing great warmth of heart; but he is considered as silly and indiscreet, and his good nature is complimented at the expense of his understanding. But our language of kindness must be so marked by propriety, that it will secure to us the character of wisdom as well as of benignity. The person addressed feels himself honoured as well as gratified by such kindness. Where kindness is shewn by persons weak and silly, a man feels that the world may suspect that they have been duped by his arts to favour him; but the countenance of men of understanding is felt to be a test of merit, and that our cause requires no unworthy aids for its support. The approbation of a man of sense is of more consequence than the applause of a thousand fools.

I am not recommending the swelling words of vanity, for these are as ridiculous as the diminutives of childishness; but that speech fraught with grace which is cherished in the memory of the grateful, and which will bear to be repeated.

Finally. The expression intimates the constancy of this suavity in language. The benevolent man is not like those who, in the season of good humour, are profuse in the language of kindness, but who, when provoked, have mouths full of cursing and bitterness.

They have no command of their temper; and when this is the case, men have no control over their tongue. The merest trifles will rouse them to fury; and though, when the paroxysm is over, they will talk with regret and shame of their violence of temper and language, the recurrence of something as unworthy of notice will inflame them to the same degree of passion as before. Reason is aided by no principle of sufficient strength to control irascible feeling. But the good man's kindness in language is habitual, for it proceeds not from a sudden impulse, but from a potent principle of Christian charity. He feels that his brethren have such a claim on him for the language of kindness, that he cannot refuse it without disobedience to the authority of his Master, and incurring the condemnation of his own heart. Sudden provocation will not throw him off his guard who possesses his soul in patience; nor will ill usage make him forget that the person who gives it is still his brother, and a brother whose evil must be overcome with good.

There are some who, in speaking to their superiors, are soft and complaisant, but rude and imperious in talking to their inferiors. On the former they will lavish every epithet of respect and every profession of service, but to the latter they disdain to address any expression of condolence under their sorrows, or of approbation of their exertions, however admirable. But the good man is no such respecter of persons; and it is not because he dare not, but because he will not, use the language of severity, that he hath the law of kindness on his tongue. He is regulated in his mode of conversation, not by worldly consider-

ations, but by the will of his God; and those who associate with him find him as they left him, for he is established in every good word and work.

CONCLUSION.

It is a reflection which naturally arises from a review of this subject, What a union of excellences characterizes the conversation of saints! Wisdom and kindness united distinguish it, and thus render it respectable and amiable. Wisdom secures kindness from rashness and indiscretion, and kindness guards wisdom from harshness and severity. This union of excellences in conversation corresponds with that which marks the Christian's conduct. It resembles the co-operation of fear and love, of patience and active zeal, in the religious character. Fear guards the softer feelings of the heart from presumption, and love precludes slavish terror. Patience keeps zeal from undue eagerness in its movements and anticipations, and zeal preserves patience from the languor of despondence. This admirable union of excellences, so well adapted for adorning the conversation, improving the mind, and perfecting the character, furnishes an argument for the divinity of our religion, the strength of which every enlightened mind will discern.

To induce you thus to order your conversation, let me call upon you to consider how much your own happiness is interested in it. You will thus escape all those uneasy feelings which rashness and severity in speaking never fail to produce, and you will not be addressed in language of this description by others. You must have seen with what consideration the

mild and the inoffensive are treated, and how unwilling even the rash and the violent are to deal rudely with them. "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger."*

Consider the influence which your example may have in meliorating the tone of conversation, and blessing the intercourse of life. Children generally exhibit the temper and manners of their parents; and this wisdom and kindness will save you from being annoyed by their petulance and folly; nay, its influence will be felt in every company in which you mingle, and others will copy what they feel to be so estimable.

To the female part of my audience I may be allowed to say, that such wisdom and kindness will effectually check the sarcastic reflections which some are so much disposed to throw out against the frivolity and scandal of the conversation of their sex, while they spare the folly and ribaldry too often chargeable on that of their own; and that, while other qualities may attract to them the admiration of the gay, these specified in the text will secure them the respect of the wise and the esteem of the good. Let them also mark the patterns of these excellences set them by holy women, whose sacred songs, recorded both in the Old and in the New Testament, in the spirit they breathe, and in the lessons they convey, yield them counsel and encouragement in all pious conversation. How beautiful is the account of the family of Philip the evangelist! This man, it is said, had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.† They were all endowed with the extra-

* Prov. xv. 1. † Acts xxi. 9.

ordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost; and they were employed not only in foretelling future events, but in communicating religious knowledge in a way suited to the gentleness of their sex and the modesty of their nature.

Consider the pattern which our Saviour hath set you of wisdom and kindness in his talk. He did not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. The words which proceeded out of his mouth were gracious words, and he had the tongue of the learned, with which he spoke a word in season to the weary soul. "Never man spake like this man"* was an encomium called forth by the energy and sweetness of his manner, and the grace and truth with which he spake.

Consider how soon our tongues shall be silent in the grave, and how soon all opportunities of encouraging the feeble in their struggles, of defending truth from the cavils of wicked men, of reproving vice, and of comforting those who are cast down, shall be for ever at an end. Brethren, the time is short, and the house of silence is nigh: speak therefore the truth in love.

There is a book of remembrance, in which God records our discourse; there is a day of judgment, in which by our words we shall either be justified or condemned; and as we wish that the opening of that book may not cover us with confusion, and that the sentence of judgment may not doom us to destruction, let our speech be always marked with true wisdom and Christian love. Amen.

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* John vii. 46.

DISCOURSE XII.

PRUDENT MANAGEMENT INCULCATED.

PSALM cxii. 5. *He will guide his affairs with discretion.*

A VERY foolish opinion is entertained by many, that a high degree of religion is incompatible with the active management of worldly affairs, and that a man whose heart is in Heaven will take little interest in any earthly object. By this absurd idea some endeavour to avoid the censure which they deserve for their incapacity and sloth in their temporal affairs; and they maliciously insinuate,—and some are so silly as to give credit to the insinuation,—that the man who discharges the duties of his calling with prudence, assiduity, and success, knows little of the power of religion, and must be ranked with those who mind earthly things.

That such ideas should have prevailed in the church of Rome, and that she should have canonized the dreaming enthusiast and the idle drone, is not astonishing, since it is from these that she fills the ranks of her orders and the cells of her convents; but it is strange that they should be found where religion exists in its pure and enlightened form. Notions of this kind make religion the jest of the scorner, and an object of disgust to the active and the busy, who are ready to imagine, that it demands from its votaries

the incessant observance of its forms, and that those who yield themselves fully to its influence and guidance must lay their account with enduring all the mortifications of poverty. But such notions are utterly groundless. Religion requires from men every effort that is necessary for the maintenance of their families, represents heedlessness and imprudence in worldly affairs as crimes against them and sins against God, forms a variety of habits favourable to business, and suggests many counsels which guide to success. While it strips the objects of the present scene of that false importance which is attached to them by the carnal mind, it does not exhibit them as utterly insignificant; and while it speaks of the good man's portion as laid up for him in heaven, it represents the comforts of this life as calling forth the efforts of a wise and patient industry, and furnishing the means of a judicious beneficence. Thus it is mentioned in the text as the character of a good man, not that he thinks his worldly affairs beneath his attention, and gives them only a partial and reluctant notice, but that he will guide them with discretion.

In this discourse I shall specify some instances in which good men shew their discretion in the management of their affairs.

1. Discretion teaches them to lay down a proper plan according to which their affairs shall be conducted. He that acts merely from the suggestion of the moment, and from the impulse of present circumstances, will often do what he will bitterly regret.

Such a man acts, not from reason, but from feeling, and this is a guide too rash in its dictates for the consultations of prudence, and too violent in its movements for the pace of moderation. In the moment of strong feeling an object or event appears very different from what it does when it is examined in all its circumstances.

It is not amidst the embarrassment of difficulties, the perplexity of opposite counsels, or the urgency of contending passions, that we can deliberate calmly or fully. When difficulties arise against which no human foresight could have provided, we may in this case expect a guidance from above in answer to our requests, which he hath no reason to hope for who never thought that any evil time should arrive, and who is a stranger to all prudent concern about the future.

It is our wisdom to sketch out the way in which we wish to go ere we move a single step, and to do this with that prudent reflection, and that devout acknowledgment of the Most High, which will be rewarded by our walking surely. Let us resolve what objects we will pursue, what portion of time we will devote to each, how we will act if successful, and how we will bear disappointments. Let these plans be sober, for such only will be found practicable or beneficial. The plans of the romantic, who mistake extravagance for magnificence, and the flatteries of presumption for the assurance of hope, are the result of false views of the world and of themselves, and lead to efforts which speedily exhaust the fortune and spirits of the sanguine adventurer; but the schemes of the prudent are well matured, they are the suggestions of careful

observation, and meet in their execution with no difficulty but what was anticipated, and no opposition but what they are prepared to encounter and to overcome.

2. Discretion is shewn in our not undertaking too many things at the same time. There have been persons of such uncommon powers, that they have been able to manage very different concerns at the same season. Such has been the extent of their information, their powers of application, and the versatility of their talents, that they have been able to turn from one object of attention to another very opposite in its nature, and to manifest equal accuracy, ingenuity, and energy as before. Others, from the vanity of being thought like them, have attempted to do this, and have executed nothing properly. They disdained to be like the tame and patient drudge who toils along in one unvaried path; yet the man whom they set at nought acquires a respect and derives an advantage from his steady application, which can never be gained by their desultory efforts. Even those whom they admire would have been far more eminent than they are if the whole energy of their minds had been directed to one object. The stream which is divided into so many courses, and winds through so many fields, if it had continued to flow in one great channel, might have been the medium of extensive commerce, and the source of abundant wealth.

When men of ordinary powers engage in too many affairs, some of them must be neglected, and none of them will be prosecuted with comfort. The failure of such persons is so evident that it is generally anti-

cipated. The attention is distracted; their means of operation which, if confined to one object, would have effected a great deal, come to nought by being scattered over so many, and while they are occupied with one, a favourable opportunity for improving another passes by unheeded never to return. There have been many merchants prospering in business, who, in haste to be rich, have taken large farms which they knew not how to manage, on the improvement of which they expended the savings of their traffic, and in the care of which their shops were neglected; disappointed in the returns which they expected, and unable to answer the demands which are made on them, they become bankrupts, and are obliged to begin the world anew. Their fate is an evidence of the folly of slighting certainty for hope, and of mingling the speculations of rash adventure with the duties of sober industry. And there have been farmers who have engaged in manufacturing concerns, and have laid out in rash and unprofitable speculations the money which, if expended on their farm, would have yielded them a sure and happy return. "Let every man then abide in the calling wherein he was called,"* with whose duties and results he is acquainted, and to which his habits have been formed; and let it never be forgotten, that divided efforts and distracted attention are as unfriendly to happiness as they are incompatible with success.

3. Caution is another way in which this discretion

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* 1 Cor. vii. 20.

is manifested. There are a variety of ways in which the prudent man manifests his caution. He is cautious in the choice of those with whom he connects himself in business, lest, instead of finding one to give him assistance and advice, he fall in with one whose indolence makes him lie as a dead weight on him, or one whose extravagance no profits can supply. You must take care that he is one of such integrity and moral principle that he will neither impose on you nor take undue advantage of others. Acts of this description will reflect discredit on you, and will most assuredly mar your success. It is proper, too, that you ascertain the temper of those with whom you are to be thus connected; for to be associated with one that is proud, irritable, or peevish, is a continual torment. It is often difficult to dissolve connexions in business when once they are established; nay, it is sometimes attended with painful results and injurious disclosures; and it is wise to take every possible method, before they are made, to form them in such a way as that a change may be neither necessary nor desirable.

Caution must also be exercised as to the credit which is given, that it be not allowed to persons who are unworthy of it, or to an extent which may impede you in the prosecution of your business. Credit is given in this way to secure countenance and goodwill, but large sums are thus irretrievably lost; and, in other cases, when a man asks his own, he excites greater resentment than he would have done if the sum had been less or the indulgence shorter. Sometimes credit is given from the reluctance of a good heart to refuse solicitation, but it is weak and silly to

be the dupe of every applicant, or to be unable to resist those who urge you to save them at the expense of injuring yourselves.

Caution also must be exercised as to modes of living. It is most foolish in him who is toiling for his bread to furnish a house, or give entertainments, like him who has made his fortune; yet how often is this done. A thoughtless vanity is gratified by this mode of conduct for a little, but it is only to be mortified more severely in speedy beggary and unpitied ruin. Some are ready to think, that this splendour will secure their credit and extend their business, but it will strengthen the suspicion of rivals, stimulate the inquiries of the envious, and disgust the sober and the prudent, whose good-will is of most importance to their success and respectability.

It must also be exercised in borrowing; that we borrow not to a greater extent than we can answer, nor abuse the confidence which our neighbours may repose in us. The facility with which credit is given in this country has, no doubt, tended much to the advancement of commerce, and to the rise of men of talent from low estate; but it is often abused by fools and by unprincipled speculators, and an honourable mind regards the abusing a generous and liberal confidence as more atrocious than open robbery.

Caution must also be exercised in discerning the signs of the times, and in adapting bargains to the state of the market. You are not to watch these with excessive solicitude, with a selfish regard to your own profit only, or that fretfulness when matters accord not with our wishes which characterizes some worldly

men, but with that prudent attention to our own interest, the neglect of which will involve us in losses and difficulties, and with a benevolent design to further the advantage of others.

We must be cautious also not to push business to an extent beyond what we are competent to manage, or with a keenness which may injure our health, or which may tempt us to infringe on the time which should be sacred to devotion, and to preparation for an eternal world. Many who managed respectably and successfully a limited business, have ruined themselves by extending it beyond what their education and abilities qualified them to conduct; and who are the persons who are most clamorous against any deduction from the six days of the week for the occasional observance of any religious rite, and whose irregular attendance on the worship of the Lord's day suggests the suspicion that they are then serving Mammon? It is the man who is making haste to be rich, and who is overcharged with the cares of this life.

4. The discretion of the good man is apparent in the order of his affairs. This is an important part of discretion in management; and where this is attended to, business will be conducted with a facility and propriety gratifying to yourselves and beautiful to others. But where order is neglected, most toilsome are men's operations, and most imperfectly are things done. Every thing should be done in the proper time; for if this is not the case it will encroach on the season due to another duty, and it will either be neglected, or, in attempting to do both at the same period, we shall spoil both.

It is of great consequence for those who are executing any thing for others to finish it by the time fixed. Much sin is committed in the breach of such promises, and much wrath is excited which punctuality might have prevented. By being accustomed to the violation of such promises, your sense of the importance of truth may be weakened, and you may be in danger of violating more sacred pledges when difficulties impede their fulfilment. Some, from extreme anxiety to obtain employment, will promise to finish what is committed to them in a space of time which they know is too limited; and others, to appease the anger of those whom they have disappointed, will assure them, that at such an hour they will obtain what they want, and by such pitiful arts subject themselves to abuse from which caution in giving assurances, and fidelity in keeping them, might have saved them.

In this order is included likewise the keeping regular accounts of your transactions. This is necessary to your own satisfaction; and should misfortunes overtake you, it is the only thing which will satisfy others that you have not acted the part of knaves or fools. Every night let the transactions of the day be reviewed; and this should not be omitted on any one occasion, for this may lead to a farther postponing of it till the adjustment of affairs becomes so tedious and burdensome, that it will be entirely relinquished.

It is wonderful how much will be done by a man of such habits, and it is accomplished with nought of that perturbation which marks the procedure of persons of an opposite manner. It is not by the lamp

which now blazes and then sinks in darkness, but by the steady light, that we are guided and cheered in our progress.

It is of great consequence in any undertaking to commence it properly, not to omit the necessary preparations, or any of the preliminary steps. The eager and the forward may despise this caution; but you know that the honour will be awarded, not to what is first, but to what is best done.

In the management of public business the strict observance of rules is absolutely necessary. The raw, the violent, and the enthusiastic, may insist that these should be disregarded, but they are the bulwarks of justice, and secure to every cause a fair and ample discussion. The violence which treads down these will usher in confusion and every evil work.

5. The discretion of a good man is apparent in his steadiness. We are apt, when any thing occurs to disgust us, to relinquish an undertaking in which we have engaged. If it turns out more difficult and laborious than we had anticipated, and if it appears not likely to give to those interested in it the expected satisfaction, we are ready to desist from it entirely, and thus to lose all the fruit of our previous toil.

It should be carefully considered, that by this unsteadfastness we shall lose the confidence and the respect of others which would have been increased by opposite conduct; that a prosperous issue of any undertaking is always heightened in the pleasure which it yields by the previous toil and suffering to which it has subjected us; and that patient continuance in duty will assuredly be accompanied by the approba-

tion of your own minds, which will be increased by the coldness of others.

There are some of such a volatile temper, that they are frequently passing from one employment to another; and some are so giddy, that the least amusement will call them away from the most urgent piece of business, and in detailing news or canvassing public measures, they will waste the hours which should be devoted to their task. Village politicians are seldom either sober or industrious. Dissatisfied with their condition, which they think not at all suited to their talents, and the evils of which are aggravated by their inattention to its duties, they vex themselves in vain by their attempts to change it, and give proofs of their competency to conduct the affairs of the public in the mismanagement of their own. Some, too, will saunter about on visits to their friends, to the great injury of their business, and to the impeding of the industry of others to whose houses they go. One indolent man may keep a number idle, although it would be the truest kindness were they to put him to shame by a strict attention to the duties of their calling. Recreation is only gratifying when prudence permits it as a short respite from toil, as a recruiting of the strength and spirits after labour, and as a necessary preparation for future exertion.

To make up for what has been lost in folly, some will exert themselves beyond their strength, or finish articles in too much haste to be either creditable to their hands or satisfactory to their employers. It is impossible that such persons can succeed well in life. As well might we expect the moss to gather round

the rolling stone, or the graft to blossom and bear fruit which is removed before it has time to unite itself properly to the tree, as that such persons should prosper. Continue at every task assigned you with a determination that, till it is well done, you will not quit it, and this will ensure its being executed properly.

6. Impartiality is another way in which discretion is manifested. If you give undue preference to some of your employers, it will disgust the rest. They whom you deem too insignificant for your care may be able to do you most material injury, and those whom you gratify at the risk of their displeasure, may soon shew you that favour is deceitful. Wisdom and justice require courtesy to all.

If you are called upon to manage any disputed matter in behalf of another, no consideration of friendship, no impulse of gratitude, and no prospect of advantage, should influence you to give him any other preference than what justice warrants; and if it requires you to decide against him, his displeasure will be a tribute to your honour and integrity.

If your neighbours have committed their children to any of you, that they may be instructed by you in your business, it is not inconsistent with impartiality, that you should notice superior activity and attention with peculiar praise, but let them all have equal opportunities of improvement. Grudge not that some of them require more labour from you to bring them forward than others; and while those who excel will be a credit to you, let your conduct be such as to satisfy the candid, that the deficiencies of others are to

be ascribed not to negligence on your part, but to incorrigibleness on theirs.

7. I may add, that this discretion is shewn in our avoiding all extremes in our religious and moral conduct. There are persons who, in their eagerness to attend religious meetings, and to promote the interests of pious institutions, neglect their business; their families are made unhappy by their inattention, their children become careless in the pursuit of an education which no parent watches, and engage in courses from which it may be impossible to recover them. Think not that by such conduct you will reclaim from the drudgery of Mammon those who are labouring only for the meat that perisheth, for you will confirm them in their worldly solicitude,—you will make your good evil spoken of, and were the conductors of these institutions aware of the injury you do them by your extravagance, they would refuse such countenance from you. Where such is the spirit of the wife, when she becomes thus a devotee, the concerns of her family are disregarded, and her husband and children are driven in quest of comfort to scenes where they are entangled in the pollutions of the world. A due regard to the public interests of religion is highly proper, but it must be manifested in a consistency with the claims of domestic duty; and if our attention to the comfort of our relatives is influenced by pious motives, Jesus will regard it as shewn to himself.

Discretion is shewn also in avoiding the extremes of niggardliness and profusion. Some are so niggardly in the support of their families, that discontent

and murmuring are never absent from their dwellings; and others are so profuse, that they rear up their children in carelessness and extravagance. Some are so avaricious, that no claim of charity can open their heart; while others, from a wish to support their sinking credit, will give far beyond what they can well afford. But wisdom will tell us, that there is no charity in giving what belongs to other people, and that it is more blesssed to give than to receive. Wisdom will teach us to mingle the softness of Christian benignity with the boldness of true zeal and courage,—to rejoice with trembling, and not to sorrow as those who have no hope, whatever calamity may befall us.

Finally, The good man shews his discretion in the timely and proper adjustment of his worldly affairs in the views of death. There are some who make no settlement of their affairs, and, in consequence of this, their property goes to persons they never wished should possess it, or is wasted in disputes betwixt opposite claimants. From an excessive attachment to the world, and from a childish imbecility, which shrinks from a deed that bears so direct a reference to death, they will not make any testament, and leave those whose welfare should be dear to them, to suffer for their neglect.

Others cannot be brought to make a will till they feel the hand of death upon them, and then it is made with a precipitation which prevents the proper adjustment of their affairs, or produces errors which occasion its reduction. What anxiety and confusion arise in the minds of the dying respecting the forma-

tion of such a deed, at a season when time is so precious, and when every moment is claimed for preparation for eternity!

There are some who, though they err not in these respects, yet shew much imprudence in the arrangement which they make of their property. They leave it in such undue proportions among their children, as create bitter animosities and lasting alienation: and in other cases, provisions are suspended on conditions which it is tyrannical to exact, and odious in them to fulfil. To be cut off with a shilling, or to inherit a father's property, have been the alternatives held out in case of regarding or disregarding their dislike to alliances which they intended to form. And with regard to others who have no near relations, great want of discretion has been shewn in men's leaving their property to institutions whose funds overflow, and the advantage of which is questionable, to the neglect of others which are not supported as they deserve, and which have for their object the noblest interests of humanity. Now, a wise man will avoid these errors, —he will so seasonably arrange his affairs, that when his last illness comes, he may have nothing to do but to die; and he will distribute what he has to dispose of in those fair proportions which are adapted to the claims of gratitude and of kindred, of piety and of charity.

It only remains, that I should shortly suggest the motives which ought to influence you to this prudent management of your affairs.

Consider how much it will tend to your own comfort and advantage. It will free you from that per-

plexity and from those anxieties which make the imprudent miserable when they are forced to examine their situation; and it will most probably crown your efforts in business with success. Few have risen in the world without prudence. Where the rash and the thoughtless have gained any eminence in wealth or honour through the influence of friends, or by a sudden spring of genius, they have soon disgraced it by some act of folly. It is often more difficult to preserve such advantages than to acquire them at first. Should you not succeed according to your wishes, you will have this testimony from those around you, that the failure is not owing to you; and should you be disappointed in your expectations, it will not be embittered by reflections on your own folly.

Consider also what respectability is attached to this discretion. The indiscreet man can be trusted with nothing, and he is either pitied or despised; but it is to the prudent that others look as their counsellor in difficulties, and the guardian of their interests.

This also is the will of God, and this, I know, will impress your consciences, and give to the maxims of prudence the sacred power of religious obligation. Every practice mentioned in his word with approbation, requires imitation from you; and every trait of the good man's character which he exhibits, demands that we labour to form its resemblance in our own.

It will be an evidence to yourselves and to others, that you are among the children of wisdom; and to be ranked with such a class is infinitely better than to be numbered with the wealthy and the noble. And reflect how it will recommend religion when it is thus

associated, and when it is seen suggesting the best counsels, and prescribing the most excellent rules for the business of life. The men of the world will judge of your religion not by your forms of worship in the temple, but by your prudence in business, and your beneficence in the intercourse of life. This wisdom will stamp a bright and attractive ornament on the doctrine of God your Saviour.

Let me exhort you to pray for that Divine influence which will make darkness light before you, and which will preserve you from the base and crooked policy of worldly wisdom. "Teach me the way in which I should go; I lift my soul to thee." Inculcate these rules upon your children, for imprudence is a more frequent source of ruin than crime, and pray for them, that they may be enabled to behave themselves wisely in a perfect way. And let it be your chief solicitude, that you and they may be wise to salvation, and may, in the church and before the world, exhibit the wisdom "that cometh from above, which is pure and peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and of good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."* Amen.

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* James iii. 17.

DISCOURSE XIII.

ON SANCTIFYING THE SABBATH IN FAMILIES.

LEV. xxiii. 3.—*It is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.*

No institution has contributed so much to the happiness of man, and to the order and the virtue of society, as the Sabbath. The festivals of the heathen are associated with many absurd ceremonies, and much licentious indulgence, but the rest of the Sabbath is so holy, and its worship so improving, that it leaves us more invigorated for our toils, more contented with our lot, and more attached to our duty. How venerable is this institution in its antiquity! and ancient as is its origin, it is not like that of many customs involved in such obscurity as to elude inquiry. The word of God leads us back to the first Sabbath that was observed, and details the methods which have been employed in various ages to make known and enforce its obligation. This is a day which has been marked beyond all the rest of the week by the salvation of men; and while other institutions, however supported by human power and policy, shall pass away in the course of time, this shall continue till the end of the world, and till it is succeeded by the rest which remains for the people of God.

The Israelites having, during their bondage in Egypt, been in circumstances by no means favourable to the observance of the rest of the Sabbath, may be

supposed to have had at their release no very accurate ideas respecting it, and it became necessary to enjoin the sanctification of this day in various statutes. In some of these statutes, there are ceremonial regulations peculiar to that people; and I cannot but remark, how strongly the submission of the Jews to rites so numerous, and some of them so burdensome, evinces their conviction of the Divine mission of Moses; and that in the miracles by which he established this scheme, there was nought to excite the least suspicion of imposture. Sacrifices expensive in their nature, and restrictions disagreeable to flesh and blood, would never have been submitted to where there was any impression of fraudulent dealing, or of usurped authority. In reading these laws, we must take care not to class the fourth commandment with statutes temporary in their continuance and limited in their extent. We are to regard it as a precept of piety obligatory on men in all countries and in every age; and with it the influence and forms of religion must stand or fall.

It is not my intention in this discourse, to speak of the public or secret worship required on the Lord's day, but to confine myself to what the text prohibits and to what it enjoins in families on the Sabbath.

I. In calling your attention to what the text prohibits in families on that day, I begin with mentioning, that it forbids our engaging in any worldly business. This rest from labour is a most merciful appointment of Heaven, and it exhibits the Author of our faith as the Father of the poor, as caring for the cattle,—for to many of them, doomed as they are to

severe toil on the other days, it is a season of repose and enjoyment,—and as the comforter of the oppressed, who are, by the necessity of their circumstances, subjected to exertion, under which nature must soon sink without this frequently-recurring pause. Even the slave is taught to feel that the Sabbath was made for man, and to hail its return as the short but precious interval of repose from the toil which degrades and exhausts him.

No exception is to be made of any employment from this prohibition of labour. There are some occupations, in which the avarice or the luxury of men of the world demand the service of labourers on this day, on pain of losing employment through the week; but let none fear that he will have reason to regret any sacrifice which he makes to religious principle. Acting conscientiously will secure him support far more valuable than any he can lose.

This prohibition extends to the most secret transactions of worldly business. He is a breaker of the Sabbath who, though he opens not his shop, spends that time in examining his books,—who, though the courts of law are shut, is employed in preparing for his appearance there; and so also is he, who, though he sends not forth his servants and cattle to labour in the field, is occupied in the inspection of his farm. Such persons shew, that it is not from the fear of God, but from the lowest motives, that they act not on the Sabbath in all respects as on other days. It was the last of the three dying requests which Dr Johnson made to his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds, "that he would abstain from using his pencil on the Lord's day."

There are some in the lower classes who send for articles of subsistence on the Sabbath to those that deal in them. With whatever secrecy this is done, it has a pernicious influence on children employed in such errands, disturbs those who wish to pass that sacred time in its proper duties, tempts them to the profanation of it, and is a melancholy proof of the thoughtlessness and the irregularity of the families where it is practised.

All unnecessary journeying, walking, and visiting, on the Sabbath, are also forbidden in the text. Persons who travel on the Lord's day, not only deprive themselves of religious worship, but all those also whose services they require, spread wherever they go the corrupting influence of their impious example, and aggravate the miseries of many of the brute creatures, by depriving them of that rest which the Creator hath appointed to mitigate the evils to which the fall of man hath subjected them.

Many indulge themselves in walking abroad on the Lord's day, and plead the necessity of it to their health, and the improvement in pious feeling, of which they are conscious from the contemplation of the beauties of nature. But they may surely find a short space on some of the six days for this purpose; and when they reflect how likely it is, that in such excursions they will be led into scenes unfavourable to serious recollections and feelings, and how their example will embolden others to grosser violations of the sanctity of this day, they will feel disposed, if they truly fear God, to deny themselves this indulgence, and to content themselves with the quietness and the seclusion of their dwelling.

To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction is our duty at all seasons, and may be performed with much profit on the Sabbath; yet it ought not to be done where there is a likelihood of collecting a crowd in the dwelling of sorrow, and of leading to conversation neither suited to the day nor the scene. The visits of festivity on this day are highly improper. The bustle of preparation and the course of indulgence withdraw the attention from divine things; and instead of the stillness and seclusion so necessary for domestic piety, its scene is converted into a house of mirth. The recollection of such parties, however rare, will either make children feel disagreeably under the discipline maintained when you are alone, or suggest to them impressions as to your sincerity and consistency by no means favourable.

The text forbids our indulging in amusements and recreations on that day. We are not to spend this time in reading books of amusement; for these will suggest thoughts inconsistent with the service of this day, and feelings incompatible with that abstraction from earthly things which it requires. It would be wise for us also to abstain from the perusal of religious narratives, more adapted to excite curiosity, and to occupy the fancy by incidents novel and marvellous, than to open the understanding and to awaken the conscience. Had we wisdom and spirituality of mind, instead of yawning over books of a grave cast, we should prize the Lord's day as a precious season for undisturbed exertion in the pursuit of the best of all knowledge, and for enjoyments which are the bliss of superior beings.

There are games in which sacred time is sometimes

prostituted. A grosser insult has seldom been offered to the Sabbath, than the public countenance given after the Restoration to sports and pastimes on the afternoon of that day; and though a sense of decency has thrown discredit on these regulations, amusements of various kinds are in many places still pursued without shame or fear. It is amazing, that the desolations which God has brought on the opulent in other countries, on account of their licentiousness and impiety, has not put an end to the routs and concerts of our nobles on that day. In vain will they exert themselves in suppressing the excesses of the poor, while the deafening noise of their carriages is heard bearing them along to the scene of gayety, and while such multitudes of servants are left in associations where every thing serious is ridiculed. In vain are theatres shut on this day, if the great make their palaces the scene of fashionable parade, or voluptuous indulgence. I must add, that among the lower classes in large cities, there are multitudes who, on the Sabbath, repair to the surrounding villages, and spend the earnings of the week in gross intemperance, or in witnessing the exhibitions of those who make them sport. How degraded does Britain appear to enlightened strangers in such scenes! and they are eagerly seized by foreigners who wish to undervalue our national character and manners.

Children must be kept from going out for amusement on this day. It is impossible to think of the carelessness of parents as to this matter without grief and indignation. The multitudes of children who are to be seen sporting on the ice in winter, or roaming

over the fields in summer, is a sad evidence of the total neglect of religious discipline in the families to which they belong. They should not only be kept from such scenes, but must be restrained also from the levities and sports at home, in which they may be indulged on other days; and if this prohibition is made with the mild solemnity of holy wisdom and godly fear, they will submit to it without a murmur.

It is said to be a practice in some places to make this a day of freedom to servants, and to allow them to spend it where they please Such conduct must be severely condemned. As placed in your family, they ought to share in its rest and worship; and such indulgence deprives them of a season very favourable to their moral improvement,—destroys that reverence for God which is the only support of their fidelity to you, and engages them in scenes perilous to their virtue.

On this day, Christians must maintain peculiar sobriety in the refreshment of nature. Some indemnify themselves for the self-denial of the week, by the full indulgence of their appetites on this day; but thus the faculties and affections become languid and stupid, and man levels himself with the brutes at a season when he is called to share in the elevating influence of the Spirit of glory.

I shall only add, on this part of the subject, that all conversation unsuitable to this day must be avoided in our families. Conversation about our worldly business is forbidden, much more foolish talk and jestings which are not convenient. There are seasons when mirth may be indulged, and when austerity and gloom would be unbecoming and pernicious; but a

day so solemn calls for gravity strict, yet mild; and the heart must be strongly addicted to folly which can suggest or relish aught that borders on levity at such a season. Conversation about the incidents of the place, or the public news of the day, is also improper. Some of these may be of such a nature as to be fitly improved for moral instruction, but much caution is necessary in doing so. To go out to places of resort to collect news for the family circle, or to read the public papers in families on the Lord's day, is not only in itself a violation of its sacredness, but is generally accompanied with a relaxation of its sanctity in other respects.

There are some who would shrink from converse about their worldly affairs in their families, who indulge in remarks and narrations as inconsistent with the sanctity of this day. To talk about the strangers seen in a place of worship, or any novelty exhibited there, to indulge in animadversions on the style or manner of preachers, or to describe the brawls of contending sects and parties, their tenets, their plans, and their prospects, is a species of conversation trifling and pernicious; and its very scanty association with things sacred can hide its impropriety only from the igonrant and the thoughtless.

II. Let us now consider what the precept in the text requires in families on the Sabbath.

1. The instruction of families in religion is an important part of the duty of this day. It is the chief season in which the labouring classes have it in their power to attend to it. On the Sabbath morning pa-

rents must endeavour to stir up their children and servants to that frame which will fit them for the profitable hearing of the word, and for engaging devoutly in public worship; and let the evening be kept sacred for domestic piety. In ordinary cases, no solicitation should tempt parents to occupy a season thus claimed by any other service. There are classes in society for whom evening sermons may be necessary; but as to parents and children, they engross the time which is claimed by their appropriate duties, and are too often made the apology for hurrying over a task which requires the affectionate and patient application of the whole heart.

In the instructions of the Sabbath evening, it is fit that you examine them as to the discourses which they have heard, and impress on their hearts whatever has appeared to you peculiarly suited to their years and condition. Nothing will tend more to improve both their diligence and yours than this practice. The excuses which are made for inattention to this requirement, from want of memory, are, in almost all cases, utterly frivolous; for what title has he to complain of a defect in memory, who can repeat, with the most perfect accuracy, any detail of a worldly cast, but retains nought that is serious or heavenly? It is the heart that is in fault; let him confess this with regret and shame, and endeavour for the future to apply it to wisdom.

Examination as to their acquaintance with their catechisms and Bibles is a material part of instruction; and you must not content yourselves with the mere repetition of the answer you require, but must

labour to lead them to the knowledge of its meaning, and to serious reflection on its influence. You must endeavour to make the answer an exercise of judgment as well as of memory. Nothing shews more clearly how little the understanding and the heart have been employed in such exercises, than the silence of many, when a question or a text is analyzed, who could repeat it in the first instance with the utmost readiness.

It is very proper that you should read to your families such religious books as you think adapted to enlighten and to impress. A peculiar sweetness is felt in such passages by children as long as they live, associated as they are with the recollection of a father's voice and comments. Some care is requisite in the selection of such sermons and treatises, as what is abstruse or controversial would either be heard without interest, or would encourage a disputatious temper, or suggest doubts which might never have occurred to them. What is serious and practical is best suited for that circle. And while the religious treatises by which the good in former days have been instructed and edified are not to be set aside for those of a modern date, as some of a fastidious taste would urge, they should not operate to their exclusion. The improved taste of youth should be addressed with what accords with it in religious instruction. Veneration for what is old is ridiculous, when it makes a person disrelish the same sentiments and precepts merely because it finds them in a modern form.

Exhortation, solemn, affectionate, and earnest, should always close your instructions. There has been such a power in these addresses, that the melt-

ings of a parent's heart have been answered in his children's tears.

On such occasions parents should retire with each child in his turn, address to them such counsels as their tempers and habits may require, and pray with them while thus alone. Such counsels will be "like nails fastened in a sure place;" and kneeling beside a father or a mother, with the hand grasped in theirs, children will feel their hearts elevated and impressed in no common degree by their earnest supplications in their behalf. In their prayers, when others are present, they may be apt to suppose that they are more adapted to their case than to their own; but while thus alone with a pious parent, the child feels that it is for him a father's heart throbs, a mother's tears fall, that in wisdom and goodness he will fulfil their dearest wishes, and be what his best friends on earth, nay, what his Father in heaven would have him to be.

2. Family worship is to be observed with peculiar enlargement. It has been said by some, that family worship is only suitable on the Lord's day, as then only can it be performed with that abstraction from worldly cares and pursuits which is so necessary to its comfort and acceptance. But where the obligation of this duty is felt, it will be attended to on every day, and every effort will be made in order to its quiet observance.

On the Lord's day a peculiar fervour and solemnity may be expected. The recollections which its return calls up are powerfully adapted to stimulate pious feeling. It brings before us the acceptance of that atonement by which the curse of God was removed

from the dwellings of man, the purchase of that salvation in which all the families of the earth shall be blessed, and the interest felt by the whole assembly in our Father's house in the Redeemer's character as the perfection of beauty, in his work as the brightest triumph of wisdom, power, and grace, and in his love as the everlasting felicity of the pure in heart.

Let not your family have reason to suppose, in the hurried manner in which you perform it, that to you the exercises of devotion have no relish; and let not your languor lead them to think that your spirits are exhausted in public worship. By such languor impressions made on your family in the sanctuary may be deadened, and those who looked for further guidance in the way to heaven, and for relief from the spiritual anxieties under which they are labouring, may be sadly disappointed.

It has been the practice of some persons eminent in piety to observe family worship thrice on the Lord's day; and that they should be deemed by any righteous overmuch, or that it should be sneered at as pharisaism, is no favourable symptom. Amidst the multiplicity of public services, and the parade and bustle of religious meetings and societies, family worship is, in the estimation of many, sunk in importance. This age is marked by the introduction of many novelties; and in the ardour with which these are promoted, institutions sanctioned by the practice of the wise, and blessed in the experience of the good for ages, are lightly esteemed; while the engrossing of discourses, in many places, with mere morality, has created in the minds of those who attend public

worship there an impression of the unimportance of religious rites, and deadened the feelings by which they are prompted. A candid man will conclude that those thus frequent in family worship are "in the Spirit on the Lord's day;" and that exercises, which they might have limited to the usual seasons, but which they practised more than others, must have been delightful to themselves and beneficial to their families. There are situations in which pious families cannot attain such a frequency; but none worthy of that title will speak of it with levity.

3. Pious conversation must be maintained in families on the Sabbath. The subjects discoursed on in the house of God will suggest various topics of converse. If a doctrine has been explained and established, we should talk of its importance and influence. If a promise has been illustrated, of the encouragement which it yields, and of the returns which it claims. If a precept has been the preacher's theme, we may converse with much profit on the motives which enforce it. If any evil passion or habit has been condemned, how weighty will a parent's warnings be, when subjoined and applied at such a season!

And what a rich field for it is the Bible! The histories and character of the leading personages in it, and the lessons to be learned from these, are themes in which there is inexhaustible variety and unceasing interest. The life and death, the character and work, the doctrines and laws of Christ, are admirably adapted for it. In such conversation parents must be upon their guard, lest they fall into such familiarity in language or manner as might lessen the reverence of the

young for things sacred. The solemnity of the pulpit would be ridiculous in the instructor in a dwelling; but while more ease, freedom, and minuteness are suitable in such a scene, the strictest vigilance must be exercised, that your words and manner should be constantly under the influence of a holy awe.

The young may be encouraged to state what has struck them in the books they have read, or the reflections which have occurred to them; but caution is necessary in giving them this liberty, lest there should be aught ludicrous in the remark itself, or of levity in the manner in which it is made. The association of religion with aught that is ridiculous is almost as pernicious to the youthful mind as its association with what is fraudulent or malicious. In the one case it is apt to be regarded with contempt, in the other with abhorrence.

Great care is necessary in managing this pious converse, to keep up a strong interest in it; and nothing will have a better influence in this way than the earnestness which shews that we speak from the abundance of the heart, and adducing apposite instances of the power of religious principle and consolation.

I shall conclude the discourse by enforcing this regard to the Sabbath in your families by some considerations.

Consider how God will bless the families where his Sabbath is sanctified. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure,

nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with thee heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."* In this figurative language we are told that the Lord of the Sabbath will enrich with his best comforts the families where he is honoured. His blessing will enhance their temporal advantages, and render all their trials conducive to their best interests. It will be found that in such families there is the sweetest harmony, the fullest contentment, and the most uniform cheerfulness. Amidst difficulties which would have soured the tempers of others, and embarrassments which would have driven them to despair, they feel and they exhibit the benignant and soothing influence of devotion. It is a striking testimony which is borne to this statement in the representation of the domestic piety of a man of God, whose faith and patience were often severely tried, given by one to whom every degree of credit is due, and who narrates what he had seen and felt. I allude to the late Mr Scott, so emient in sanctity and so mighty in the Scriptures. "The peculiar piety, cheerfulness, and affection, which marked the discourse that took place on a Sabbath evening, notwithstanding the very discouraging circumstances against which my father had so often to contend, early made a strong impression upon my mind of the happiness of true religion."

Consider also the satisfaction of mind which will attend such a regard to the Sabbath in your dwelling,

* Isaiah lviii. 13, 14.

and the pleasing reflection with which you will look back on such holy days. The man who devotes this season to festivity or amusement must have many uneasy feelings, which will rise in spite of all the gayety he can summon around him; and if, by a habit of this kind, or by impious sophistry, he can banish them they will recur with double force in the hour when conscience awakens, and when he must be serious. But devotion hath a peace and joy in its exercises which the world can neither give nor take away; and the recollection of its seasons is sweet and soothing. If regret is felt in looking back on such Sabbaths, it arises from the imperfect manner in which we have observed them; and this regret, by leading us to greater zeal and caution in future, will be followed by effectual solace. The mourner in Zion sorrows in hope, and it was never yet found that he sorrowed in vain.

The influence which this sanctification of the Sabbath will have on your family through the week is another motive to this duty. You will feel yourselves excited to maintain a temper and a demeanour suited to it. Hearts so much at that time with God will not be estranged from him; and the spirituality and the kind affection so beautifully associated will work together on the days that follow.

Consider the happy influence which it may have on the world around you. Such families may be ridiculed by the profane, but even in their hearts they are respected. They are like a light which shines in a dark place; and such is the beauty, order, and peace of the pious man's dwelling, and such a contrast does it present to the noise and folly of the irreligious, that

impressions must be formed highly favourable to devotion. The children of such families are likely to keep the Sabbath in their own dwellings as they have seen it kept in those of their fathers; and thus the practice may be diffused to an extent, and continued for a period, which it is delightful to anticipate.

This keeping of the Sabbath will be an excellent preparation for family afflictions. When calamity comes upon the families of the irreligious, it is often embittered by the reflection that it is sent to punish them for the thoughtless levity in which their Sabbaths were spent; and that, as in seasons when God called for seriousness, they would hear of nothing but mirth and jollity, he hath sent them days of darkness, in which they have nought but vexation and terror. But the pious family feels that the worship which blessed their days of prosperity can gladden their days of sorrow, and that the spirit which it forms is that of unshaken fortitude and mild resignation.

The conduct which I have been recommending to you has been that of the best of men in past ages. Who are the persons whose memory is cherished with most affectionate veneration, and who are never spoken of without expressions of esteem? They are those who, like Cornelius, were devout men, and feared God with all their house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.* Such men might be ridiculed by some profligates while they lived, but there is only one sentiment which is felt at their grave.

This sanctification of the Sabbath in families is the

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* Acts x. 2.

best preparation for public worship; and it is from such families that the most spiritual and fervent worshippers may be expected to come. Could the ministers of the gospel suppose that their people were leaving the house of God for such services of domestic piety, they would part with them with the most pleasing hopes of the beneficial result of public worship. The dews of the evening shall water the seed we have sown, and God shall strengthen what he hath wrought for us.

I shall only add, that such piety in a family is a happy preparation for a Sabbath in heaven. In the religious family, heart mingles more tenderly and sweetly with heart than it doth in public worship, and is thus a more lively prelude of the state where, in the presence of the Saviour, the redeemed are one, one family in one home. Its holy calm is a pledge of the rest above. Never is a greater detachment from the world felt than at such seasons; and a good man, looking around on his family thus united and blessed by religion, anticipates their reunion in a house eternal in the heavens, where love is perfect and joy is full, and where the piety he has laboured to form and to cherish shall be exercised before him, and mingled with his in all the beauty of holiness.

Under the influence of such considerations, retire to your dwellings; and may the Spirit who now excites within you the resolution of Joshua, "As for me and for my house, we will serve the Lord,"* confirm you to the end; and may the God of love and peace be with you.

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* Joshua xxiv. 15.

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE SYMPATHY DUE TO NEIGHBOURS.

ROMANS xii. 15.—*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

OF the various distinctions which have been established among men, there is none so general as that of the sorrowful and the happy. There have been revolutions in society which have abolished all distinctions of rank, and levelled the noble with the peasant; and there are countries where gross darkness covers all classes with its gloom; but wherever we go we will certainly find the tear of sorrow and the smile of cheerfulness. No institution has yet been framed which can give to any of these the sole dominion. It is a benevolent ordination of Providence that there are frequent transitions from the one to the other, that the prosperous may not be high-minded, but fear, and that the afflicted may be soothed by the hope of better days.

Religion, which adapts its lessons to the various circumstances of our condition, teaches us how to act to our neighbours in prosperous or adverse circumstances; and represents the Ruler of the world as dispensing blessings and troubles, not merely for the happiness or the chastisement of the individual, or that others may be excited to obedience or deterred from sin, but that our benevolence may be exercised

and displayed in the kind interest which we take in all that befalls our brethren. It views man as a social being, and addresses him in this character. Its injunctions are so opposite to the selfish and malignant principles of our nature, that it is no easy matter to persuade men to practise them. Against the call to sympathy with the mourner the levity and gayety of the heart will remonstrate; and against complacency in the prosperity of our neighbour, principles as potent in their nature will rebel. But there are motives to these duties, and aids promised in performing them, the power of which has been felt by many, and which it is my prayer to God that all of us may feel, that, loving our neighbour as ourselves, we may make his happiness and his sorrow ours.

Sympathy has been a frequent subject of discussion in elegant and moral literature; and much ingenious speculation, and much beautiful imagery, have been employed in tracing its importance in the social constitution of man, the restraints which it imposes on self-love, and the softness which it sheds over the sterner virtues. My object is to consider it in its plainest form, and as it operates in the feelings and the conduct of the good to those whom Providence hath placed around them.

I. Let us consider the kindly interest which the text enjoins us to take in the happiness of the prosperous. It is obvious that this precept forbids all envy at it. Even though our neighbour may have been successful in pursuits where we have been unfortunate,—has obtained the distinction to which we

thought ourselves entitled,—or is placed in situations which we have long desired, and where we think we can alone be happy,—we must not repine at his advantages, nor complain of Providence because they are not ours. The envious man's eye is like that which has been gazing at the sun, which, while it is dazzled by its brightness, cannot discern aright the beauty of any surrounding object. There is much ingratitude and malignity in this temper; and while happiness exists which is known to it, it will torment the heart in which it works. There are some bad passions which can have no objects to excite them in the state of final misery; but that envy which will be awakened in the wicked, by the glory and the blessedness of the righteous in judgment, will never cease to wring the heart.

This precept forbids also every attempt to lessen their satisfaction in their advantages. This is too often done by pointing out to a neighbour the superior success of others, by depreciating the value of the advantages which he enjoys, or by exciting needless apprehensions as to their security. When we see men indulging a thoughtless confidence, it is an office of wisdom and kindness to warn them of the danger of presumption, and to dissuade them from measures which will subvert their happiness; but this is a very different office from that of the gloomy croaker, who wishes to harass others with his own dark forebodings. Some think they shew their candour and honesty in finding fault, and are gratified if they can make others dissatisfied as they are. If there is any glory in rendering others ungrateful and discontented, it is theirs.

There are some whose sagacity and strength of mind enable them to despise all attempts at shewing superior wisdom and taste, by undervaluing what others admire, and by suggesting alterations which the circumstances of their neighbours render impracticable; but many are so simple and so fickle as to be influenced by such remarks to their own unhappiness.

It forbids also every attempt to deprive the prosperous of their advantages, either by artifice or by violence. There are some who would shrink from an open attack on the interests of others, who can employ methods which will ruin them as certainly, though in a less direct form; and which, though they cannot subject them to punishment from men, and have a less glaring appearance of hostility in the eyes of the individual against whom they are directed, are most criminal violations of the law of love. To tarnish a neighbour's fame by slander, to alienate his friends, and to try to divert to others that business by which he supports his family, is to act as an enemy to his happiness.

This precept enjoins us to be grateful to God for the comforts and felicity of our neighbours. We must feel the goodness of God to them as a blessing to ourselves, join with them in devout acknowledgments to the Father of mercies, and even in our private devotions bless God for dealing so bountifully with them. This statement may convict many, whose pretensions to benevolence are most vehement and pompous, of a fatal deficiency in one of its great duties; and few indeed are able to say that they have blessed God for their neighbours' welfare as frequently and affection-

ately as they ought. This gratitude to God for any happy events which have befallen our neighbours may be fitly expressed in their presence. How beautifully was this done to Naomi, when her sorrow was turned into joy! The women, her neighbours, said to her, "Blessed be the Lord, who hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him."*

It calls us also to a complacency in their advantages,—not merely to those expressions of satisfaction which are too often insincere, but to feelings of delight in their welfare. Though our own situation should be full of inconveniences, perils, and disasters, it should give us pleasure that it is otherwise with any of our brethren; and instead of saying, Why are they not like us? or, Why are we not like them? we should rejoice that it hath pleased God to shew them favour. It would shew the pure and elevated benevolence of a comforter, if, instead of soothing the afflicted by the consideration that there are many more unfortunate than they, he laboured to make them feel the gratification of a noble generosity in the happiness of others. In their outward demonstrations of joy we must take a part. We are not to give countenance to the riotous mirth of the foolish and the profligate, nor go to scenes where aught of this kind may be apprehended. If it occurs where it

* Ruth iv. 14, 15.

was not anticipated, and if our disapprobation cannot repress it, we must feel it our duty to withdraw. But there is an occasional festivity and gayety in which the good may bear a part with advantage to their own health and cheerfulness, and to the religion which they love. It has been often remarked as a beautiful feature in the character of the aged, that they were gratified with the sports of the young, and viewed their hilarity with indulgence; and a much more favourable impression of piety will be produced by their frank participation in a scene of cheerfulness than by their sullen refusal to share it, or by their sitting at it with the frown of sanctimony on the countenance, or condemning it in a manner which can only provoke to excess.

This precept calls us also to use every method to maintain their prosperity,—to the suppression of every effort, and to the exposure of every artifice, which threatens it. If there is aught in their temper, connexions, or conduct, which appears to us likely to injure it, we must labour to counteract its perilous tendency, and to guard it as we would guard our own. Our prayer to God must be, that He who has made them happy may keep them so. Man is the worst enemy of his own happiness; and for one that is ruined by unavoidable calamities, thousands are so by their folly, their credulity, or their evil passions. It was under this impression that the man of old, who was more honourable than his brethren, prayed to the Lord, and said, "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand

might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me !"*

It may not be unnecessary to remark, that this precept by no means encourages an impertinent curiosity respecting the success of our neighbours. What they choose to conceal respecting it we should not seek to know, nor are we to be hasty with our congratulations. In the most of cases it is wise to defer this expression of our feelings, till, like the woman who had recovered her lost piece of silver, they call their friends and neighbours together, saying, " Rejoice with me ; for I have found the piece which I had lost." As to the continuance of our expressions of complacency, we must be guided in this by prudence. If they are prolonged, they may be regarded as dictated more by the selfish views of the parasite than by genuine benevolence. Such unwise conduct may produce feelings most opposite to those which you profess your desire to cherish. " Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house, lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee."†

To the duty enjoined in the first part of our text there are various motives. This conduct is truly noble, and shews a decided superiority to the lowest and the vilest principles of our nature. Envy and malice are principles so base, that the charge of being actuated by them is resented as the foulest reproach. It was envy at the happiness of man which led Satan to attempt to ruin him ; it was pride which led him to rebellion against God ; and these considera-

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* 1 Chron. iv. 10. † Prov. xxv. 17.

tions should render such principles peculiarly hateful to us.

The temper enjoined in the text is that of the most excellent beings in the universe. This is the spirit of angels: most affectionate is their interest in man's redemption, and rapturous is their joy at the sinner's return to his duty and to his happiness. Instead of repining that such favours have been lavished on man, and that human beings, so justly degraded and miserable, should be raised to privileges denied to those that never fell from innocence, they delight to help the joy and to guard the felicity of the heirs of salvation.

This too was the conduct of our Saviour. Though on our account he was a man of sorrows, he felt the purest delight in the scenes of happiness which he beheld around him. When entering on his public ministry, he accepted an invitation to attend a marriage at Cana, and wrought his first miracle to provide for the guests the means of innocent enjoyment. Instead of frowning on such a scene, or considering it as beneath him to give it his countenance, he delighted to share in the cheerful intercourse of neighbours and friends. When he heard from the disciples of the success of the Gospel, and saw the partakers of divine grace happy in the change which had been accomplished in them, he rejoiced in spirit, and gave thanks to God for the wisdom, purity, and felicity, which he had imparted to babes.

Consider how God himself takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants, and delights in the sinner's

reaping in joy the fruits of his penitence. It is from the pleasure he feels in communicating happiness that we behold it so widely diffused around us. The inferior animals, in a variety of ways, indicate their enjoyment, and rebuke by it the gloom and the fretfulness of man. How condescending is that benevolence of the Almighty which is delighted by their satisfaction, and which compensates them in such a variety of ways for the evils brought on them by human thoughtlessness and cruelty! In the progress of knowledge, freedom, and virtue among the nations, he rejoices. This pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in the hand to which he has intrusted it; and when the nations of them that are saved drink of those rivers of life which flow at his right hand, he will rest in his love, and rejoice over them for ever.

This conduct will be to you a source of satisfaction when your personal or domestic circumstances are most dreary and comfortless. You will feel that you cannot be wretched while any of your brethren are happy. The heart that is brooding in despondence over its own disappointed hopes will be refreshed by the contemplation of the bright prospects of others; and you will return from witnessing the happy circumstances of your neighbours, instructed, strengthened, and encouraged to better your own.

Acting in this manner will gain you the hearts of your brethren, and incline them to do every thing in their power to make you happy. There are so many ways in which our neighbours can advance our interests, that we must gain many important benefits

from their engaging zealously to serve us; and while most people feel a pleasure in thwarting the selfish, few will act thus to the benevolent.

I may add, that this will be your employment in heaven through eternity. It should recommend to us any exercise that it will have a place in a state of perfection; and your joy in the happiness of your brethren there will be proportioned to its magnitude and stability. Here the uncertainty of prosperity, and its moral perils, call upon us to rejoice in the happiness of others with trembling; but in heaven no change can take place, no fear can arise, no love can wax cold. Good men, while they exult in what God has done for them, shall see in every crown, hear in every song, and feel at every arrival at these blessed abodes, an augmentation of their happiness.

Say not, that you can take no part in the joy of your neighbours, because you consider it as a gross delusion, and must regard them as the dupes of a rank enthusiasm, which will soon lay them as low as it has raised them high. If you saw it leading them into gross extravagancies, you act right in disapproving of it; but when you see them modest and regular amidst all their cheerfulness, mild in zeal, candid in opinion, active in duty, judicious in charities, and labouring contentedly in a humble lot, you ought to say to them, "Hail! ye that are highly favoured of the Lord;" and readily obey their call, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" Let none urge, that he does not wish to have a correspondence with his neighbours in any form. Consider how opposite such a spirit is to the plans of Pro-

vidence in forming social principles in the heart of man, and in fixing your lot, not in a desert, but among your brethren. You may see no need of their interest in your welfare, but there are various events which will make you feel it, and cause you to regret your present coldness. "Better is a neighbour that is near than a brother afar off."*

Let it not be said, that you have found your neighbours indifferent to your welfare. You may be judging rashly of them, or you may have given them reason to act as they did; and even granting that their hearts were as cold as you suppose, and your conduct as inoffensive, you must remember that our behaviour to our brethren is to be regulated, not by theirs to us, but by the law of love. Our Lord doth not say, whatsoever men do, but whatsoever "ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."†

Let none urge, that their neighbours are in such inferior circumstances that they cannot rejoice with them, for nothing will gain the heart of a poor man like condescension. Your superiority will make your sympathy more valued, and your humility more amiable. There may be modes of testifying their joy which appear to you unsuitable; but it is easy for you to correct these, and the expression of your disapprobation will have such weight from your kindness, that they will be solicitous to avoid every thing which would disgust you. You say that your neighbours do not deserve their felicity,—but can you affirm that you deserve your own? It is most impious to find

* Prov. xxvii. 10. † Matt. vii. 12.

fault with the measure, the objects, or the seasons of Jehovah's bounties. And I may add, that your benevolent interest in their prosperity may impress them with the extent of their obligations to God,—may lead them to put away the habits which have offended you, and may excite them to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.

II. Let us now consider the sympathy required in the text with mourners.

What are the sorrows with which we are required to mingle ours? It cannot be the griefs of folly, which originate in the disappointment of plans which prudence never sanctioned, and of expectations which presumption only could have cherished. It is right that the rash and the eager should feel this sorrow acutely, to teach them in future to think soberly. Neither can it be the grief of the peevish and the discontented, who fret and wail because they have not obtained advantages which God hath seen it good to withhold from them, for such persons require rebuke, not condolence. Neither is it the grief of those, who, having failed in any wicked purpose, are lamenting the infamy and ruin into which their ill success hath plunged them, and not over the evil propensities which prompted the atrocious attempt. We must warn such persons of that everlasting destruction to which they are exposed, and labour, by laying open their conduct to them in its aggravations, to lead them to holy shame and sorrow. The griefs to which the text refers are the sorrows of those whom God hath visited with affliction, and of those who mourn over

those workings of corruptive principles, which are the heaviest burden of the pious heart.

This precept forbids indifference to their sorrows, and the selfishness which leads some to say, that they have afflictions of their own sufficient to distress them, and that they cannot trouble themselves with the woes of others. Remember how the Man of sorrows felt for his disciples amidst their discouragements, fears, and regrets, in the prospect of his departure, and how, amidst the agonies of crucifixion, he pitied so tenderly the anguish of his mother. The sorrowful heart, when directed to the woes of others, will be relieved, not oppressed.

It forbids also making light of their sufferings, and laughing at their sorrows as the vapours of melancholy. Too often is the despondence which claims our sympathy made the subject of ridicule. Many who deemed the trials of others of little consequence, have, when placed in their circumstances, felt the severity of that evil which they once despised, and condemned the unconcern with which they once saw others struggling with it. They find how difficult it is to do what, untried, they fancied so easy, and how hard it is to bear what they once deemed so slight.

It forbids also every feeling of satisfaction in the misfortunes of our neighbours. There are some who express, and there are more who feel pleasure in the misfortunes by which a neighbour is brought low. It is impossible to describe in language too strong the malignity of such a spirit,—no injury and no rivalship can justify such feelings.

This precept forbids our aggravating the affliction of

our neighbours, which has been done by representing it as the judgment of God on account of their hypocrisy and secret wickedness,—by alienating from them the friends to whom they looked for help amidst the wreck of their fortune,—giving wider circulation to the calumnies which are destroying their usefulness,—imputing that to their own folly and mismanagement which was the result of causes which they could not control,—by urging claims on them which it was obvious they could not fulfil, and reproaching them with the inutility and the loss of all efforts to serve them.

But this precept requires us to feel the woes of others, and to regard the stroke which has fallen on them as if it had lighted on our own heads. It is not enough that we assure them of our pity, but when alone we must mourn on their account, and implore the mercy of God for them as we would ask it for ourselves. Why does your afflicted neighbour solicit your remembrance of him in your prayers? It is because he believes in the efficacy of intercession, and is soothed by the impression of the interest in his sorrow which it exhibits. At the day of judgment, prayers for the afflicted shall be appealed to as evidences of the spirit of love as well as alms.

It calls upon us also to sooth and to comfort them, not by a feeble and passing condolence, but by the assiduous ministrations of an elightened, tender, and patient sympathy. For this purpose we must labour to be well acquainted with the various sources of comfort which are to be found in the oracles of God, and to acquire the power of selecting and expressing them with propriety. There has been a coldness and

a harshness in the tone in which comfort has been administered which was painful to the mourner. The pity which melts the heart gives softness to the speech and mildness to the countenance; and in some cases, where feeling vents itself by the eye and not by the voice, silence is more grateful to the sorrowful than the language of condolence.

This precept requires us to do what we can for the mourners' relief,—to assist them in bearing their afflictions while they are continued, and to extricate them from their troubles, though this can only be done by considerable exertions of active kindness. To deal our bread to the hungry, to minister to the sick, to relieve the oppressed, to provide a shelter for the homeless, to assist the unfortunate in attempting by other methods to support their families, and to be guides to those who are orphans and fatherless, are the deeds of sympathy which prove it to be genuine, and without which its professions are a mere pretence.

In stating shortly the motives to this sympathy, I wish you to consider how necessary it is to shew the sincerity of your benevolence. If you join only in the gayeties of the happy, you will be considered as actuated merely by a regard to your own gratification, and as selfishly shunning every scene which might call you forth to any painful effort; but by weeping with them that weep, you will shew, that in every thing which concerns your brethren, you take a real interest.

Consider what relief this will give to the mourner. The bereaved parent, while he beholds your tears fall-

ing with his over the untimely grave of his child, will feel that some friends yet remain whose hearts bleed for him; and he who is sinking under misfortunes will be animated by your aid to those exertions by which his losses may be retrieved. The aged poor, who, by increasing infirmities, are unable to pay the attention that is necessary to the cleanliness and the comfort of their dwellings, will bless the kind and active neighbour who ministers to them, and thank God for a hearth by which they can sit, and a bed on which they can stretch themselves with comfort.

By this conduct you will secure for yourselves suitable sympathy in the day of your calamity. It is not likely that in the day of adversity you will have to complain that you find every door closed and every heart hardened against you; or that in the hour of sickness and death you will behold nought in your dwelling but chilling indifference or gloomy solitude. For you the face of pity will exhibit its softest expression, and to you the voice of love will utter its sweetest consolations. Should it so happen that you should look in vain for some to pity you, you may expect the more ample testimonies of his sympathy who is the God of all comfort. It is he that gives to human sympathy all its power to sooth, and who can render the want of it unfelt amidst the tenderness and the efficacy of his own compassion.

Consider the examples which stimulate to this sympathy. Paul, who delivers this injunction, could say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"* Moses chose rather to suffer afflic-

* 2 Cor. xi. 29.

tion with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and David could say even of those who rewarded him evil for good to the spoiling of his soul, "When they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting.—I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily as one that mourneth for his mother."* How beautiful was the sympathy which was expressed to Job at the close of his captivity! As he had experienced how much the harsh reflections of friends and neighbours could embitter his calamity, so he felt how much it could be alleviated by their kindness. "Then came to him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they who had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house; and they bemoaned him, and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an ear-ring of gold."†

Think of that Redeemer who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, in whom every mourner saw the meltings of pity, and the kindness of friendship. Can we behold the tears of Jesus flowing, and call this precept a hard saying? Let the world extol its champions while their garments are rolled in blood,—let the philosophers exhibit the sages of ancient times trampling in the pride of understanding on every soft impression, we will point to the Saviour's tears as the pledges of his compassion, and the gems in his crown of mercy. And of the great God it is said, that in all the afflictions of his saints he is afflicted, that his bowels

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* Psalm xxxv. 13, 14. † Job xlii. 11.

are troubled for them, and that he delighteth in mercy.* By such motives I call you to put on bowels of mercies, and to remember those that are in bonds as bound with them, and them that suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body.

Say not that you cannot mourn with your neighbours, for they have brought their calamities upon themselves. It ought to be considered that all our miseries are the result of sin, and that the best of men cannot assert in the evil day that they are guiltless.—It may be the design of Heaven, in what you rashly call God's judgments, to bring them to repentance, and by pious suggestions you may soften their hearts. Compassion for the sinner is quite compatible with horror for his crimes; and your solicitude that their correction may yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness may dispose to serious thought and feeling, those whom disdain and harshness would have made utterly obdurate.

Say not that their sorrow is excessive, and that you cannot enter into it. If your sympathy is kind as well as judicious, it will make them more calm and moderate. Neither say you that their calamity is irremediable, and that your sympathy must be vain.—God can make the wilderness to blossom; and if he should not, your sympathy may reconcile them to his will. And let none imagine that they will be much more frequently called to the last expression of sympathy than to the former, for much more good is received of the hand of the Lord than evil. Judge

* Micah vii. 18.

not of human life from the dark colouring of the gloomy and the splenetic, but by what you witness. In every family mercy rejoices over judgment. You may, perhaps, have received little commiseration under your own distresses, but deem not this a reason for indifference to those of others. Had Christ acted on this principle, no human being should have shared his sympathy.

CONCLUSION.

In the precept which has now been illustrated, we behold a striking proof of the divinity of the Gospel. It differs so widely from the selfish spirit of that luxurious age, and from the favourite maxims of the philosophy then in vogue, that we can only account for the influence which it obtained by its heavenly origin, and by the spirit of love opening the heart to its beauty. At that period, Rome was sunk in all the corruption of unhallowed pleasure, and its philosophers disgraced themselves by palliating its excesses; but, behold, a moralist arises, who issues the purest and most extensive precepts of beneficence, admirably adapted to heighten the joys and to alleviate the sorrows of men, and, amidst his labours, to make us happy for eternity; you see what he doth that it may be well with us in time.

Let me exhort you to beware of every quarrel with neighbours which might interrupt this sympathy.—These quarrels are to be avoided on account of the good which they impede, and the misery which they produce. Indulge not your children or servants in any thing which may give offence to others; and as

you would wish them to rejoice in your prosperity, shew no symptoms of any wish to exalt yourselves above them.

Let persons about to settle in any situation inquire into the character of its neighbourhood, and having fixed, avoid frequent removals. By these you are taken from a scene of usefulness and comfort,—have new inquiries to make,—new arrangements to form,—and new friendships to cultivate; and though removal may place you in better circumstances in some respects, if it takes you from a good neighbourhood to one not so favourable, this will weigh against many advantages. Consider that a good neighbour tends much to make another so, and that a readiness to oblige will generally be met by similar promptitude.

Since there is so much real grief calling for our sympathy, let us not waste it on what is fictitious. It is a striking fact, that the interest felt in fictitious joy or grief is by no means favourable to sensibility to the prosperous, or afflictive incidents in the lot of others. In the scenes of a novel or a tragedy, sorrow appears in colours very different from those it wears in real life. There tears drop from the eyes of the lovely, and the downfall is from elevated situations; but in real life we see the indigent in rags, the marred visage of the diseased, and the frightful gloom of the despairing. It is by contemplating human misery in its most repulsive form that we feel the strength of its claims on us for relief, and exercise a more pure and generous compassion.

Let those who have hitherto disregarded the injunctions in the text be persuaded to comply with

them in future. You have found the emptiness of pleasure in which selfishness permits none to share, and the oppressiveness of affliction in which you had no sympathy;—come now and yield yourselves up to the charities of the Gospel, and walk in love. If you persevere in the course of the selfish, you will find, as age advances, your need of the sympathy of your brethren. Of the tree which is full of sap, and whose branches are covered with blossoms, it may be thought enough that the birds sing among its boughs, and that the heart of the spectator beholds its beauty with delight; but the time is coming when, shattered by the blast, or beginning to crumble in decay, it will require all the support which can be given. You think that you need not the joy of your brethren to enhance your prosperity; but how helpless will you be in affliction when no mouth shall be opened to plead for you, and no hand stretched out to relieve you! How sad is old age when the tear is never wiped from the furrowed cheeks, and its many infirmities are neglected. Think of the misery before you in another world, where no tear shall ever be shed in sympathy with yours, and where God shall laugh at the calamity of the wicked. By repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, submit to him while he waits to be gracious: and then, while you experience the blessedness of conversion and pardon, God will call his family in heaven and earth to rejoice over you.

Finally, Let those who have attended to these injunctions in the text implore the influences of the Spirit of power and love, to enable them to be more ac-

tive than ever in the various offices of sympathy. In your early lessons to the young, labour to check the operations of selfishness, and to animate and guide their feelings of compassion. In exciting emulation, beware of encouraging envy; and in leading them to relieve and instruct neglected children, the utmost vigilance must be exercised that they be not contaminated. Be not weary in well-doing; and while you feel that those who are associated with you in residence and in church-fellowship have peculiar claims on your good offices, let your sympathy extend to all whom your wishes may benefit or your condolence cheer. Look forward to that world, where your sympathy can be only expressed in welcoming and congratulating the happy. Here you live in a scene where selfishness predominates; there you shall dwell where love is perfect, and where grace triumphs in all that has been done for human happiness. Amen.

DISCOURSE XV.

THE KIND MASTER.

LUKE vii. 2, 3.—*And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.*

TRAITS of excellence strike us with peculiar force, when they appear in characters and scenes where we did not expect to find them. The admiration excited by their intrinsic beauty is heightened by surprise, and by the contrast which we form betwixt what is presented and what had been anticipated.

These remarks may be aptly illustrated by the narrative which has now been read. In this heathen centurion we find a variety of good qualities in their brightest form, which our Saviour himself marked with delight, and held up to the imitation of the disciples. Though the Gentiles were accustomed to regard the Jews and their religion with scorn and hatred, this man had built them a synagogue, and perhaps attended occasionally on its worship. The strict subordination maintained in armies, and the deference required to its officers, were calculated to foster a haughty spirit, yet was he meek and humble. He had not enjoyed any personal intercourse with our Lord; yet, from the report of his miracles, he believed

in his supreme power over the most fatal maladies, and in the successful exertion of it in the utmost extremity; and though inured to scenes not at all favourable to the feelings of compassion, in a profession in which a heart stern and immoveable was the first requisite, and at a period when slavery sanctioned the harshest treatment of domestics, he shewed the kindest interest in his sick servant, and by the medium of others, as well as in person, solicited relief for him from the gracious Saviour.

With the spirit and conduct of this man our Lord was highly pleased. Amidst the neglect and scorn with which he was treated, even by those among the Jews from whom might have been anticipated the highest admiration of his character and the greatest zeal for his claims, it was delightful to him to receive the homage of this candid stranger. It was a pledge of the honours destined to his name throughout the Gentile world; and the condescension and compassion which his request for his servant indicated, were qualities which, in their loveliest form, adorn his own character, and which, at the right hand of God, he delights to display in his own procedure, and to cherish and honour in his followers.

It is on this part of the centurion's character which the text calls us to meditate; and in this discourse I shall shew in what way the humanity of masters should be manifested to their servants, and shall recommend this conduct by a few motives.

1. Humanity to servants should be shewn in every necessary attention when they are sick. There is

doubtless a prior obligation on relations to take care of them, and they must be as unreasonable as they are unfeeling who expect that the families where their connexions serve are to relieve them from this duty. But there are servants who are friendless, or whose disease may be such that they cannot be removed without injury or danger, and in such cases humanity requires their continuance with you. There are circumstances in families which may make it necessary to provide accommodation for them in other houses. In this case it should be as comfortable as it is in your power to make it; and you must still consider them as under your charge. Such a servant can with no propriety be said to be an outcast, and he has no cause for fancying that he is so.

If the sickness is such as to require it, medical aid should be sought; and it is necessary to remark, that application for it should not be improperly delayed. It is too common not to send for medical men till the malady is come to its extremity; and he who at an earlier stage of it might have arrested its progress, can only leave the bed-side of the patient with the sad announcement that the case is hopeless. A compassionate heart will not see a fellow-creature groaning in agony without making an effort for his relief. If there is aught in your dwelling which can relieve them, you must readily administer it; and if their situation requires watching by night or by day, proper attendance must be given or obtained. Servants are often debarred from sleep by waiting for the return of families from scenes of enjoyment; and it must be an unfeeling gayety which would grudge a sleepless

hour for the mitigation of their pain. Much, too, is expended in sumptuous entertainments; and sordid must be their hearts who can sacrifice so largely to luxury and to vanity, and refuse the little which is requisite to cheer or to support the sick. To a good heart there is more satisfaction in one act of mercy than is felt in all the vain shew of the world.

Humanity, when guided by religion, will labour by prayers, and counsels, and religious reading, to guide them to the fountain of life and salvation. If they are careless, they must be roused to serious reflections; and where they are afflicted with doubts, and fears, and painful remembrances, they must be addressed with suitable consolations. If your prayers for them are marked by the faith and compassion of the centurion, they will be as acceptable to Jesus as his were, and will obtain such an answer as will be to his glory, to the good of the sufferer, and to your own advantage. Consider how many of the graces of the Holy Ghost are exercised in this piety and mercy, and improved by it; and so far from being degraded by such efforts, you are acting in the spirit of Him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, who washed the feet of his disciples, and who was among them as one that served.

Nothing will attach servants more to the interests of a family than such kindness when they are sick; and they will feel impelled by the grateful remembrance of it to efforts for your welfare which no other consideration could have prompted. Sickness is a solemn monitor of the speedy termination of earthly distinctions, of your nearness to the spot where the

small and the great, the rich and the poor, meet together, and where the servant is free from his master. The idea of this will repress every suggestion which would lead to cold indifference and stately reserve, and awaken the pity which is required by wisdom and benevolence.

2. Humanity must be shewn to servants in their maintenance. I by no means intend to assert that they are to be indulged with food unsuitable to your circumstances or to their own. Where servants are placed in families of rank and opulence, it would shew an enlightened regard to the true interests of menials to debar them from indulgencies to which they are in many cases allowed unlimited access. Were they always to continue in such situations, there might be less reason on their part for such restraints; but they may go into families where they will feel unhappy in a less liberal allowance, and they will be settled in houses of their own where sobriety and frugality in their strictest forms are required, and for which they are ill prepared. By such profusion servants acquire habits which are destructive of all domestic peace. Requiring what no man labouring for his bread can afford, and, peevish, fretful, and sullen, because their palate is not gratified, the wife loses the confidence and affection of her husband, and either drives him from his dwelling, where he might have been happy, or provokes him to abusive treatment when he might have cherished her with kindness. And what are the habits which she will cherish in her children? Not the self-denial, the moderation, the providence, and the contentment,

which are the best security for comfort, but thoughtlessness, waste, and dissatisfaction. Male-servants thus indulged are likely to be selfish and sensual, though placed in circumstances where a rigid temperance is essential to the welfare of their families, and to demand gratifications which can only be attained by the practice of dishonesty, or by the excessive toil or miserable privations of their relatives.

But my object in this part of my subject is to condemn that mean and cruel spirit which deems any thing good enough for a servant, which grudges every morsel which they put in their mouths, and which allots to them either a measure of food too scanty for the support of nature, or so coarse that nought but necessity could induce them to take it. This conduct is not only a violation of the law of humanity but of justice; and it is most unwise, as it tempts servants to pilfer what is denied them, and leads them to consider it as no sin to steal from so avaricious and sordid a master. It is most unwise, too, as it unfits them for a due degree of labour; for how absurd is it to expect from a domestic thus poorly fed, the same vigour and activity as from one who is supported with a proper liberality. Nothing can be more mean than the reflections which are sometimes made on the insatiableness of servants; for it is plain, that nature in hard labour requires a degree of support not necessary when life is passed in ease or indolence. Some have complained, that give what they would their servants were never satisfied; but let them be fed with food convenient for them, and have no just reason to complain, and if this is the case, and they should be so

thankless and discontented as to do so, you will find it easy to silence their murmurs.

There have been some who have judged it prudent to take food more coarse and scanty for themselves, and to give what was better to their servants, that they might not have their feelings wounded by the looks and expressions of petulant dissatisfaction, and that they might not excite suspicions of their straits and difficulties. A good servant will not reduce them to such a necessity.

3. Humanity should be shewn to servants in their task. It will lead you to proportion this to their years and to their strength, and not to require from the young and the declining what can only be done by persons in full vigour. Young creatures have received injuries from such severity which have made them objects of charity for life. It is a beautiful instance of humanity, which is sometimes exemplified, when the heads or the members of families execute part of the tasks of the young, where they have judged that these were more than they could perform.

Humanity will lead you to give them intervals in a heavy task, and not by protracted exertion to exhaust their strength. Such intervals will be so far from encouraging indolence in servants, that they will induce them to resume their toils with alacrity. They will feel confidence in the considerate kindness of their masters, that when a pause is proper it will be ordered. With regard to the seasons of relaxation allowed to servants, it may be proper to remark, that consideration is necessary as to the place, the species of amusement, their associates in it, and the time allotted to

them. There are scenes to which servants sometimes repair, where their earnings are squandered in the gratification of vanity and folly, where their minds are corrupted, and from which they return far less disposed for their duty than when they quitted it. It is true humanity to forbid their repairing to such scenes, and the hardest bondage is far preferable to wanton mirth.

Humanity will lead you not to animadvert too severely on unavoidable defects in the execution of it. It is highly proper that defects should be pointed out, that they may guard against them in future; but this should be done in a manner which will shew that you are solicitous to improve, not to condemn, and that these faults have not made you insensible to what in the performance was worthy of praise. Every allowance must be made which is required by their years, their inexperience, and the state of their bodies or minds. It will lead you also to give such aid in the performance of it as may be necessary, and such a remuneration as is called for by the efforts and sacrifices which they have made to serve you. The engagement of domestic servants with you gives you a right to all that they can do for your interest; but where uncommon exertions have been made on any particular occasion, they call for some token of approbation. There is a profusion which encourages foolish expectation, but there is a parsimony which represses their exertions. When the master is resolved to withhold all that he can in recompense, the servant will spare all he can in labour. There is a sluggishness in some servants, and a careless or reluctant mode of doing their duty in which they ought not to be indulged but

reproved; but the good servant, whose work is his pleasure, claims every benevolent attention, and will receive it from a wise and kind master.

4. Humanity to servants must be manifested in your general manner. The authority with which God hath invested you must be maintained. The peace and property of families will be ruined where children and servants are allowed to act as they please; but this authority will be better supported by mildness, associated with good sense and propriety of conduct, than by boisterous abuse, or by severe threatenings. In giving your orders, tell with firmness, but with discretion and affability, what is proper, and what you wish to be done; and let them be given with such clearness and precision, that no mistakes may be made. In instructing them there should be a compassionate remembrance of their imperfect education, that your patience may not be exhausted by the slowness of their progress, and if one method fails of success let another be adopted. In giving them their wages, let not your manner be such as to suggest the idea that you pay them with reluctance, and shew no wish to avail yourselves of any pretext to abridge their claims.

In reproving them for their faults, let your object be to guard against the repetition of the offence rather than to expose the offender. The execrations and outrageous language which some pour forth against servants who have displeased them, serve only to irritate and to harden them. It is said, that there are some servants who will pay no attention to their duty unless it is commanded in a stern and imperious

tone, and this is the absurd apology which is made for the curses and the abuse with which some masters load those under their authority,—"that they will be quite careless and negligent were they spoken to in a softer manner." This has been the senseless pretext of shipmasters, as if the more horrid their blasphemies were the more certain they should be of the subordination of their crews. If refutation of this were necessary, it would be amply found in the order, harmony, and activity which prevail in vessels where the fear of God dwells. Who can expect to correct a fault in a servant by being guilty of one against his Maker, or that he will teach a servant to give him his due by losing sight of what he owes to himself? There are some who animadvert on the faults of their servants before visitors while they are serving them. There cannot be a grosser breach of politeness than to introduce such a topic as this; and a servant must feel acutely the shame of such an exposure, while every good-hearted visitor will condemn its cruelty.

It is cruel to persist in upbraiding servants with their faults. Having administered at the proper season a due reproof, we should never advert to what is past, unless it has become absolutely necessary. And in giving them certificates of character, we must let no remembrance of a fault which has been repented of induce us to speak coldly of their true merit, or to insinuate aught to their prejudice. We must always distinguish betwixt an act and a habit; and a master is, in a moral view, responsible for faults in servants which he might have corrected, but did not.

5. Humanity must be shewn to servants in your

attention to their spiritual interests. The unhappy state of a soul which is without God and without hope, is much more deplorable than any outward calamity. What an object of pity is a human being ignorant of God,—at enmity with him,—the slave of corruption,—forgetful of eternity,—and exposed to the wrath to come!—Yet how many have servants in such circumstances, without the least feeling for their lost estate, and without the least effort for their salvation. Compassion calls on you to exert yourselves to save them by pious instruction and serious exhortation, by giving them as frequent opportunities as possible of attending on the public means of grace, by putting proper books into their hands, and allowing them time to read them, and by warning them against every thing which appears calculated to entice them into sin, or to extinguish serious impressions. If they have formed erroneous notions of any religious doctrines, labour to lead them to right views of them; and if their ideas of the evil of any sin, or of the obligation of any duty, are loose and feeble, you must endeavour to convince them of the perilous nature of such false impressions both to their virtue and to their happiness. Moral caution is a most valuable lesson both for them and for you, and let it be taught with the zeal of a tender conscience and the delicacy of a pure heart. If they are labouring under painful impressions of their danger and misery as sinners, let them be encouraged to seek rest in the grace of Jesus; and base and cruel is that spirit which can make such a state of mind the subject of ridicule, and laugh at the grief of those whom God hath wounded.

In promoting the conversion of servants you will find your own advantage in their increasing care and diligence, in their grateful prayers in your behalf, and in the Lord's blessing your house for their sake.

It is much to be regretted that exertions for the spiritual good of servants are so rare, and that there are so many families in which the young are so far from being led on to perfection, that they are left to forget all the pious lessons of their childhood. Such is the natural indolence of the human mind, and such is its reluctance to religious exercises, that it requires powerful excitement to stimulate its attention to the oracles of God, and many are too proud and too careless to apply such an excitement.

How shameful is the conduct of those masters who, by their entertainments on the Lord's day, deprive their servants of public worship, and who, by their profligate sophistry and loose conduct, labour to subvert their religious principles and to corrupt their moral feelings! With what face can such persons talk of the profligacy of servants,—a profligacy which they themselves have produced or emboldened? It is but justice to remark, that in the higher orders in society, religion is extending its influence, and that while many of the lower orders are learning to pour contempt on the civil and religious institutions of their country, many of their superiors are rejoicing in the consolations of the Gospel, and are eager to promote the knowledge and the power of the truth as it is in Jesus. Under such masters, servants will be objects of a pious care which, we trust, will be blessed for the formation of grace within them, and for filling them with the fruits of righteousness.

II. Let me now recommend this humanity by a few arguments. Consider that this is a sure test of virtuous principle. The law of the land will compel you to do them justice, but to the duties of humanity, which have been specified, no power of man can oblige. The impulse which leads to them is the benevolence and sympathy of a good heart.

Consider, too, that thus you will fulfil the designs of Providence in placing them under your care. You was made their superior, not because of any higher claim that you had to this distinction than any which they possessed, but that you might have it in your power to act the part of a humane master. Your lot was not intended to be a sphere for your pride, but for your beneficence, and over every part of your conduct in it your Lord watches with unremitting attention.

Consider, too, how honourable it is to Christianity when the conduct of masters is thus humane. It is the glory of the Gospel that it has banished slavery from Eurpoe. Slavery, with its crimes and miseries, was firmly established among the most polished nations of antiquity. Amidst all their struggles for political freedom, and all their eulogies on liberty, the chains of the slave were unbroken. It was not destined for philosophy to break these chains, but it was the Gospel which was to say to the prisoners—"Go forth;"—and it did so. Dear as the love of power is to the human heart, it was induced by its influence to relinquish it, and the domestic tyrant was rendered by its spirit the friend and father of his dependants. Laws sanctioning oppression and abuse have been repealed, and the injunctions to masters in the apostolic epistles have led to a course of conduct to servants

which no other mandate could have prompted or secured. The career of the Gospel has been marked by continued ameliorations in the state of society. It not only decreed the abolition of the slave-trade, but has led to unwearied vigilance and activity to make that sentence effectual, and, by instruction and kindness, to prepare those in bondage for the reception of freedom. It is its peculiar glory that wherever its influence extends it forms the heart to compassion; and the best master is the man who lives and rules under its power.

Consider that you have a Master in heaven, and what account you shall render to him. Your families are daily and hourly receiving of his bounties, and shall you not be merciful as he is merciful? You pray that you may find mercy of the Lord in the day of judgment, but remember that he shall have judgment without mercy who hath shewed no mercy. "If I did despise," said Job, "the cause of my man-servant, or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me; what then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us?"*

The humanity thus shewn to servants will have a great influence on your general conduct. Charity thus beginning at home will be diffused like a fountain abroad, and as rivers of water in the streets. The impulse to courtesy and to kindness will be strengthened; and by the habit thus formed there will be a

* Job xxxi. 13—15.

prompitude and a cheerfulness in your beneficence which will make it a double blessing to its objects.

I may also state the consolation which this conduct will yield you. Servants thus attached to you by your humanity may be of great advantage to you in any reverse of fortune; and when sickness assails you it may be expected that they will nurse you with the most assiduous care. In sickness the heart is soft; it is peculiarly susceptible of strong impressions; humane or cruel treatment at such a period takes such a hold of it that it is never afterwards forgotten; and where opportunity is presented a requital will be made. Should your children ever be under the necessity of going to service, the remembrance of the way in which servants were treated in your house will secure for them attentions and advantages which they could not otherwise have enjoyed.

Let heads of families remember, that this humanity must be manifested by their children as well as by themselves. Let them shew their children its propriety and beauty, and check every tendency to tease or distress their dependants by petulant humour or by unreasonable exactions. Harshness and severity in their conduct to them will be followed by a similar mode of acting to you whenever they can do it with impunity; and when you are treated with neglect or unkindness by them, you will reflect with bitter remorse that you were not more careful in teaching them the lessons of mercy. You are responsible to God and to man for the part which they act while under your care, and it is in good conduct at home that you have the best security for their behaving with propriety abroad.

I shall conclude the discourse by a few exhortations to servants. Let them be grateful to God that he has thus provided, in the humanity he requires of masters, an asylum for them under the evils to which they are liable. The goodness of God is to be traced in all the compassion and beneficence of his creatures. If at any time you are placed in families where you are treated with unkindness, regard it as a correction from Heaven that you did not value happier circumstances as you ought, and beseech him, by the testimonies of his love, to compensate you for all that you have to suffer from the severity of men.

Let them beware of imposing on the humanity of their masters by feigning sickness or infirmity, or by representing ailments as worse than they really are. This has been sometimes done to obtain exemption from labour; and God will punish you for it by aggravating your maladies, or by shutting up men's bowels of compassion against you when the distress is real. Guard against every thing which has a tendency to injure your health. There are practices in which servants indulge which, by exposing them to cold, and abridging their hours of rest, are unfavourable to their welfare. There are passions, the indulgence of which is most prejudicial to health as well as to virtue, against which I would warn you. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."* There are fleshly lusts which war against the soul; and there are evil principles which, by the gloom which they spread over the mind, the

* Proverbs iv. 23.

anxieties they awaken, and the violent irritation which they produce, have a most fatal influence on our whole nature.

Let the humanity of masters stimulate your activity in their service. If they do more than the strict letter of the law requires of them, you certainly ought not to limit your exertions by it. What you can do for the welfare of families do it heartily; and if you have fellow-servants, imitate the example of kindness set before you. Complain not of the inconvenience and labour to which their illness subjects you; but minister to them as you would wish them to minister to you. It has been sometimes said, that give a servant authority over other domestics, and he will be most rigorous in his conduct to them. If there is a tendency in human nature to seek a compensation in rigour to inferiors for the humiliations we must submit to with regard to those above us, it becomes you to repress it, and let your kindness always be proportioned to what their state requires.

Finally, Let your conduct to the heads and the members of the families where you are placed be kind and sympathizing under all their maladies. Pray for them without ceasing, watch with them without a murmur, and let your strength be promptly put forth in raising and supporting them. It is honourable to them when you bear testimony to their kindness, and to you when they attest your fidelity; and it will be happy for both if you have this testimony borne to you by the Judge of all in that day when the small and the great shall stand before God.

DISCOURSE XVI.

A WICKED SERVANT.

2 Kings v. 20.—*But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.*

To trace the operation of vicious principles, and to exhibit the miseries which follow their short-lived joys, is one of the most important services which a public instructor can perform. It is in this way that men are guarded against the deceitfulness of sin, and that its fair promises of pleasure and advantage are deprived of their power to corrupt and ensnare. This office is performed in the sacred writings in the most faithful and striking manner; and this is done in its historical details as well as in those portions which are devoted to the inculcating of moral duty. The lessons of history are often lost by the partiality or the prejudices of the historian, which have led him to palliate what is unjust, and to give a darker colouring to weaknesses and follies than reality or candour allowed; but in the Scripture wickedness is seen undisguised, and its course and issue are described with all the plainness and force of truth.

It must also be noticed as another distinction of sacred history, that while other narratives cannot detail

the secret misery which is the result of iniquity, and often leaves villany before us in all the blaze of success, the Scriptures exhibit to us the bitterness which the heart knows. They were written by his suggestion who sees what no human eye can see, even the anguish of a guilty conscience; and who hears what no human ear can hear,—the sigh of regret, and the reflections of remorse; these are represented to us not in the language of fancy, which may be charged as that of suspicion or exaggeration, but in the statements of him by whom the punishment is inflicted, and to whom all things are open.

The passage now read gives us a most striking view of fraud, of the principles which prompt it, of the vile artifices by which it labours to gain its ends, and of its sad result. A discourse on this subject may be useful to every class of hearers; but it is especially intended for warning to servants, on whose truth and honesty the interests of families are so much dependent. A good servant will be grateful for such a lesson, and will feel more determined than ever to hold fast his integrity; those who are tempted to put forth their hands to iniquity may be led to repel the suggestion with horror; and those who have done wickedly may go and sin no more.

In the following discourse I shall call your attention to the crime and to the punishment of this man, and to the moral lessons which they teach.

Let us consider, in the first place, the crime of Gehazi.

1. The principle which led to this crime was the

love of money. This is a passion which degrades that immortal soul which was formed for higher attachments, and which renders the pursuits of man mean and grovelling. It is a temper most irrational in creatures whose stay on earth is so short, and who at death must leave all that they possess behind them. It is founded on a false idea of the utility of wealth, and it is quite insatiable; for after the sums have been obtained which were the fancied limit of a man's solicitude and pursuits, it presses with increasing vehemence to something further, and the heart under its power is never so eager to grasp more as when it is about to be torn from all.

In Gehazi such a spirit was peculiarly inexcusable. He had a master to take care that his wants should be supplied, and had not those apologies to plead which arise from a situation helpless and solitary. He had seen the providence of God often interposing in a very remarkable manner for the support of his master, and as this should have repressed solicitude on his part, it stamped a double criminality on the employment of unlawful means of getting wealth. He had cherished this spirit, too, amidst all the self-denial and the heavenly conversation of Elisha. Had he been placed among those who were lovers of this present world, and whose grovelling minds had no wish beyond its advantages, it would not have been surprising if he had learned their way; but though he saw his master's uniform superiority to the attractions of earth, he made gold his hope.

What further shewed the power of this principle, he was eager to acquire wealth and fine raiment for

the mere purpose of hoarding them up. He knew he durst not wear these garments, nor shew this money before his master, but he wished to have them that he might gratify his eyes by surveying them. The hours which his master spent in the secret worship of God he meant to occupy in the secret worship of Mammon. It seldom happens that others are robbed of their money by wicked men that it may be laid up. What they obtain in that way is soon consumed upon their lusts. It is a striking fact, that the money for which the thief puts his life in jeopardy is wasted with a rapidity which seems to indicate that he cannot be at rest till it is gone. But there are others whose delight it is to amass, and at whose death, or the detection of their villany, there have been found, to the astonishment of all around, clothes, trinkets, and money in heaps, which avarice kept as strictly from their own use as from the use of others.

2. The station and character of the person who committed this crime claim our notice. He was the servant of the man of God. It is probable that Elisha knew not as yet the rottenness of his heart; and so completely had he disguised his want of religious principle, that it had not been suspected. With such a man as this prophet, how great were his advantages for walking in the fear of God! Had he been the servant of a Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, his knavery should not have been so surprising; but weeds have sprung up on holy ground, and birds of prey have nestled in the sanctuary. Servants in the families of ministers, with all their advantages for the attainment of piety, have shewn little

delight in sacred things, and have compensated themselves for what they deemed the gloom and the restraints of their dwelling by excesses in folly when these were in their power.

There have been servants who have gained the complete confidence of their masters by a shew of great respect for religious ordinances, by reading good books, and by their apparent delight in instilling pious sentiments into the minds of the young, and who, having thus put them off their guard, defraud them in every possible mode. Even Judas, the companion of the Holy One of God, who saw piety in the loveliest form, and heard wisdom in the words of eternal life, was a thief, and carried the bag, and was accustomed to secrete articles for himself.

Let not this be adduced in justification of the practice of representing a man of serious discourse and habits as a knave. This was long a favourite artifice with writers of a libertine and infidel cast; and it has induced the young to shun the society of those who should have been their best friends, and to yield themselves to the influence of the loose and the profane, as if there could be integrity where there was no fear of God, or honourable feeling amidst gross sensuality. We regret that the most popular writer of the day, and who is unrivalled in the vivid glow of his historical sketches, and in his admirable pictures of nature and manners, should have exhibited among his characters, persons addicted to lying and fraud, as punctual in the minutest offices of devotion, and profuse in the language of piety, without the least remark to guard against the unfavourable conclusions with re-

gard to religion which he must have been aware the young and the gay would eagerly draw from it.

And let it not be adduced as a confirmation of the indiscriminate and harsh reflection, that religion in servants is the mask of deceit. That some have used it in this way is true; but the surprise and the horror which this excites, is a proof of its rarity; and far more frequently have articles been purloined by servants who were utter strangers to every devout habit. The reproaches cast upon religion when the knavery of the hypocrite is detected, aggravate the criminality of his conduct, and furnish an additional motive for the strictest integrity in all professing godliness.

3. Let us attend to the time and the manner in which the purpose to commit this crime was formed. It was after he had witnessed the noble and disinterested conduct of his master in refusing the least return for the cure which God had wrought by him. One would have thought that such a spirit should have made him ashamed of his base avarice, and that he would have abhorred the idea of acting in opposition to it. Instead of this, he seems to think that his master had acted foolishly, and he is angry at him for that for which every heart, but one utterly depraved, would have revered him. To insult and wrong the stranger whom we have seen others befriend is a most aggravated sin. Amidst all which in the Jewish law was adapted to form the Israelites into a peculiar people, they were commanded to love the stranger as themselves; and how beautiful is the humanity of the good Samaritan to the wounded Jew, after the cruel ne-

glect and disdain with which he had been treated by the priest and the levite!*

The purpose of committing this crime was suddenly formed, and as promptly executed. Some have considered this as an apology for great crimes, that they were committed under the impulse of the moment, and were not the result of long concert; but no man will venture on committing an enormous crime whose mind has not been familiarized to the idea of such deeds, and whose moral feelings have not been utterly blunted. The heart is shocked at the first temptation to an atrocious sin. It is generally by petty thefts that the robber is prepared for an open attack on the highway, or for breaking into shops or dwellings. It is commonly with a trembling hand that the highwayman first presents his pistol to the breast of the traveller, and with a faltering voice that he at first demands his money; but how soon does he learn to rob with the gay audacity of the man who can laugh at fear. There are secret sins which embolden for open wickedness, and where the fire of evil desire has been long cherished, it will burst forth in a dreadful blaze.

You will observe, also, how Gehazi binds himself by an oath to take something from Naaman. What a striking proof is this of the inconsistency of which the human mind is capable! Had he bound himself by an oath to protect Naaman in his person and property, it would not have surprised us, but he swears by the Most High to defraud him. We should imagine that the idea of the Almighty should have driven the cri-

* Luke x. 33, 34.

minal purpose from his heart; yet conduct like this is not uncommon. Profligate youths have bound themselves by oath to stand by one another in some criminal enterprise, and cast lots who should enter the place where they intended to pillage or murder. Religious ceremonies thus prostituted sear the conscience, and aggravate the condemnation of the wicked.

4. The crime itself demands our attention, and the manner in which it was committed. Some may think that his offence was trivial in comparison with what it would have been, had he assaulted Naaman, and taken the silver and the garments from him by force; but he knew that, attended as the Syrian nobleman was, violence could not be used, and that if aught was to be got it must be obtained by fraud.

It may be thought, too, that he shewed some moderation in declining to take the talents when they were offered him, and in accepting them only in consequence of Naaman's urgency; but this reluctance, if we may judge from his conduct in the preceding part of the narrative, was feigned; or, if it was real, it proceeded from his fear of not being able to secrete so large a hoard from the knowledge of his master.—The lie which he told was a gross breach of the divine law, and his pretext was calculated to sink his master's character in the estimation of Naaman, and to destroy those favourable impressions of him and of his religion which the cure of his leprosy, and the noble conduct of Elisha, had produced. The message which he delivered as from his master, that two young men, sons of the prophets, had come to him, for whom he wanted a talent of silver and two changes of garments, was very much adapted to destroy his opinion

of the integrity of the prophet. Such a sum could not be needed for two sons of the prophets; and the Syrian was likely to suppose that it was a mere pretext,—that the professions of generosity which he had made he had no heart to support,—and that, with all his venerable appearance, his marks of self-denial, and his power of working miracles, he was a slave to wealth.

And what was he to think of the character of the God of Israel, when the first of his prophets acted such a part? There was a great likelihood of the return of those prejudices in favour of the gods of Syria which his cure had banished; and that as he preferred the rivers of Damascus to the waters of Israel, so would he its deities to Israel's God. Though the conduct of Gehazi was no way injurious to the body of Naaman, it was most cruel to his soul; and if it had not such an unhappy influence on him, it must be ascribed to the overruling grace of God which prevented it, and maintained alive all his favourable impressions. It has been remarked, that Naaman's was the only miraculous cure of the leprosy recorded in the scripture till Christ came into the world; and there is reason to think that it was attended with a blessed change on his soul. Tradition reports, that the mercy he had experienced, moved him to erect an hospital for lepers at Damascus; and a traveller tells us, that there is such an hospital richly endowed just by the walls of that city, which owns Naaman for its founder.

There is another circumstance which aggravated the crime, that it was committed against a stranger, who, by the laws of Israel, and by the dictates of

humanity operating in the rudest hearts, is the object of kindness. It is a strong evidence of depravity that this circumstance often emboldens the wicked in their efforts; and that when they find, from the speech, the dress, or the habits of a person, that he is a stranger, or a foreigner, they mark him down as a fit dupe of their artifices, or one whom they may injure with little fear of punishment, as having no friends who will take his part, or feel eager to avenge his wrongs. But in such persons every generous mind must be interested, and the law must, in a peculiar manner, spread over such its protecting shield. If strangers should be abused or robbed with impunity, our countrymen in foreign lands must soon be deprived of property and life as a retaliation for such unjust and impolitic connivance at a stranger's wrongs.

5. We shall only call your attention further on this part of the subject to the hypocritical conduct of Gehazi after his crime. He deposites his booty in a place of security, and goes and stands before his master quite unabashed. We are ready to imagine that the looks of Elisha should have covered him with confusion, and that when he said to him, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" the idea of the detection of his crime should have struck him speechless, or have led him to a full confession of the nefarious deed; but he answers in terms the most reverential, to make his lie the better received, "Thy servant went no whither." He had seen various instances of his master's prophetic powers, and it is strange that he should have imagined that he could conceal this from him; but such is the deceitfulness of sin, that it flatters men

with the idea of secrecy, and leads them to the audacious denial of their wickedness in situations where their guilt seems unquestionable. Like the adulterous woman that wipeth her mouth and saith, "I have done no wickedness;" or like Ananias and Sapphira laying at the feet of the apostles part of the price of their possessions as the whole, so do many deny the acts of fraud and robbery which they have committed. Even after they have been proved against them by the clearest evidence, and to the complete satisfaction of persons uninfluenced by prejudice, they have insisted that they are innocent, and called on the Most High to witness that they are condemned unjustly.

There have been servants strongly suspected of pilfering the money or the goods of their masters, who have denied it in the most positive terms, and with the most solemn imprecations; but their manner has shewed that they felt that their protestations would not be credited, and the vehemence of these only evinces how strongly they feel the unfavourable conclusions which have been formed concerning them, and that, in their own defence, they have no sufficient evidence to produce. To behold in the silence of those whom they wish to convince of their innocence, conviction, or, at least, suspicion of their criminality, and to wait in vain for the slightest expression of the zeal of friendship, or the hope of charity, is most mortifying. In circumstances of unjust suspicion, the innocent can appeal to him who searches all hearts; but when the guilty venture to do it, it must aggravate their fears, and render the condemnation of their own hearts more painful.

One would have imagined that the services of religion, in which Gehazi was now probably to join with his master, would have filled him with horror; but such is the deceitfulness of sin, that some have gone, after the commission of crimes, to the rites of worship to hush conscience, or to avoid the suspicion of their fellow-creatures: "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal,—and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord."*

II. Let us now consider the detection and punishment of this crime.

The prophet informs him, that his mind, enlightened by the Spirit of God, knew the whole scene, and the purpose to which he intended to appropriate the money. His address was delivered to him in such a manner as to preclude all denial, evasion, or reply.

The punishment of his crime might have been instantaneous death. For a less aggravated sin a number of young persons had been torn in pieces by wild beasts. This punishment left him space for repentance, and perhaps he employed it for the benefit of his soul. Of this, however, we have no account, and there are circumstances which lead us to suppose that, amidst the loathsome change which took place on his

* Jer. vii. 9—11.

body, his heart remained unsanctified. Those who have lived long under the means of grace without serious impressions, are generally more obdurate than those less favoured in situation, and feel little desire, in the most afflicting circumstances, for any comfort which religion hath to offer.

But in other points of view it seems very dreadful. It was a leprosy of the worst kind that seized on him. Travellers remark, that it makes the whole body so hideous and so noisome, that it may well pass for the utmost corruption of the human frame on this side the grave. It was a perpetual memorial to him of his sin, and proclaimed his infamy to all around him. It was punishment from which no art could ever relieve him: it was to cleave to him to his dying hour, and was to be the curse of his descendants from generation to generation. How poor was the satisfaction which he had promised himself in his changes of garments, or bags of silver! These garments could not hide his loathsomeness, nor that silver purchase for him a cure. And how little satisfaction hath he in the wealth which he hath got by theft or fraud, who carries in his forehead the brand of infamy, or who pines in a dungeon on the bread and the water of affliction.—Society visits some crimes of men on their posterity in order more effectually to check the commission of them; and there are crimes which, though not visited thus on families, attach a stigma to all the descendants of the transgressor. Though this is painful to them, yet, on the whole, it is most beneficial to society; for many are deterred from such deeds by the shame in which they will involve those who are dear

to them. Few atrocious crimes escape punishment in this world; and there is a day coming when every transgression shall receive a just recompense of reward. "O gather not my soul with sinners!"

III. Let us now consider the moral lessons we are taught by this scene.

How careful should servants be to check those passions which lead to fraud and theft! The most common of these principles at present is an avidity for dress and ornament. Let them reflect that such unsuitable attire will never recommend them to the notice of any prudent man; nay, it must have a direct tendency to impress his mind unfavourably, and to counteract the influence of engaging qualities. He must see in it a profusion which no industry on his part could support, and a habit forming, which no influence of his will be able to subdue.

How much better would it be were that solicitude for outward decoration to be turned into an eager desire for mental improvement,—to the culture of qualities which will render them a blessing to all with whom they may be connected. How respectable is that servant, and many such there are, who, instead of lavishing her earnings on dress most unbecoming her station, appropriates them to the comfort of aged parents,—the education of brothers and sisters who, from their helpless age, can do nothing for themselves, —or for the support of pious and benevolent institutions. Such a consecration of them will bring down that blessing of God which maketh rich, and will attach to their name and memory love and respect.

There have been servants, also, who, to make provision for establishments of their own, have appropriated the goods of their master to themselves; or, by giving false accounts of the prices at which they bought or sold, have pocketed sums to which they had no claim. This has been done by confidential servants, to whom was committed the management of the affairs of the widow and the fatherless. And can they expect to prosper after such a series of villany? Have they no fear of that curse which the Lord shall bring into the house of the thief, and which shall consume it?* And have they no dread that to their widows and children similar perfidy may be shewn? How much better would it be to settle in a dwelling of their own with the smallest pittance, which, with a clear conscience, they could call theirs, and beseech the Giver of all good to enable them to turn to proper advantage!

We are taught also by this narrative, how necessary watchfulness against temptation is in every situation. There are situations in which the temptation to fraud and theft is presented more frequently and strongly than in others. In going to serve with merchants, the access which servants have to the shop, and to the place where money is kept, has excited in some a desire to pilfer. It would be wise for servants, when choosing their situations, to prefer those in which their temptations would be fewest, and their religious opportunities most ample, and not to be influenced by the mere consideration of ease or emolu-

* Zech. v. 4.

ment. That confidence in their own virtue which leads some to brave temptation, and to resent as an insult the most friendly admonition to be on their guard, is no favourable indication of their future conduct. They will engage readily in situations where others have been ensnared; and, by the contempt which they feel for their imbecility, and their high ideas of their own prudence and firmness, lose those motives to circumspection which their fall presents. But there is no situation, however humble and retired, in which circumstances may not occur to excite covetous desire. The visit of a wealthy stranger, and the exposure of what he may have left in unsuspecting confidence open to their eye or their hand,—an event which occasions any great bustle in a dwelling, and which, in the variety of preparation, engrosses its members, and scatters many valuable articles around,—or the necessary absence of those in it accustomed to the management of domestic affairs, have stimulated the covetous heart to steal. If, in paradise, the seat of innocence and bliss, Eve put forth her hand and took of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and did eat, let it not be thought, that in any scene any advantage can blossom in safety, and that no evil desire can spring up near it.

How vain is the idea of sin passing without detection! It is true, that we are not to expect miraculous discoveries of crimes in the present day, but Providence often brings them to light by a variety of circumstances. A mark on the notes, gold, or property stolen,—a part of dress lost in the scuffle,—an expression uttered when the transgressor is off his guard,—

the horrors of his own conscience, which will not allow him to be silent,—the confession of an accomplice,—the quarrels of the guilty, or the passing by of one who knows the actors in the nefarious deed, have often led to the detection and the punishment of crimes which the perpetrators imagined would never be discovered.

It is a striking circumstance, that one sin often leads to the detection of another. The dissipation of the young shopman, his parties of pleasure, his excursions and associates, have led to the detection of his fraud; while that of the female servant is surmised from her apparel being neither suited to her wages nor to her station. Nothing can shew a greater infatuation. Expensive apparel, in such stations, always excites disgust; it is too often obtained by dreadful sacrifices, and indulgence in it will make them feel more bitterly than they would otherwise do the difficulties in domestic life to which they may be subjected. Vanity is a principle which operates in circumstances where it was least expected; and while its display in some cases is thought of merely as a subject for ridicule, those who have studied human nature know that its demands are more imperious and insatiable than those of passions deemed more formidable.

It is an idea which has been suggested by the tempter to servants in some situations, that amidst such quantities of money in silver or copper, the abstracting of a few shillings or pence will pass unnoticed,—that amidst such heaps of merchandise the taking away of a little cannot be discovered,—that

amidst such a profusion of articles of dress, some may be taken without being missed,—and that what may be pilfered from the portmanteau of a stranger will not be wanted till he has got to a distance, and that he will not deem it worth his while to make any inquiry respecting it; but when such wicked conceits are suggested, let them be repelled by the solemn sentence, "Be sure your sin shall find you out."* There are motives of a nobler kind which ought to influence you, even the commandment of God, and the confidence which is reposed in you; but to those whose sordid minds are regardless of such considerations, it must be said that suspicion is full of eyes, that purloining cannot long escape detection, and that of all modes of injustice this is the most irritating. The pilferer who, under the shadow of our confidence, injures us, or those who are lodged with us, is considered as acting a more wicked part than the open assailant. In the case of open assault the purpose of an enemy is known, and a man hath it in his power to attempt resistance or escape; but in the case of fraud committed by a servant, he feels that the attention which attracted his confidence was influenced by the basest ends, and suspects that he has acted on a system of treachery for a course of time. It is viewed as part in a series of deliberate wickedness. In such a case, professions of regret made on detection receive little credit, and few will repose the least confidence in such an offender. Let the person, whatever is his station, who is tempted to any crime, re-

* Numbers xxxii. 23.

collect that God's eyes will go with him to the scene of guilt, mark all his movements, and charge him with it in a manner which shall fill him with confusion and horror. "Fear God, and keep his commandments:—for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." *

We see, in this narrative, how awful the punishments are which God inflicts on the workers of iniquity. The leprosy of Gehazi is a fit emblem of that foul stain which theft leaves on the name, which cannot be wiped away, and which is horrible to every heart which is not dead to honourable feeling. We hear, alas, how frequently! of the imprisonment and stripes, transportation and death, by which theft and robbery are punished, yet let not those who escape such a reward of their deeds imagine that they have nothing to fear. Though no human tribunal should punish them, God can find them a tormentor in their own bosom. Let not those who are tempted to act unjustly, think of what man can do as the only thing they have to dread. Let them think of the pangs of a guilty conscience, of the sorrow of the world that worketh death, and of the powers of the world to come. No art can keep Jehovah's wrath from the conscience. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth up the bones;† and a wounded spirit who can bear? The atrocious offender, whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, may laugh at remorse as the dream of the imbecile

* Eccl. xii. 13, 14. † Prov. xvii. 22.

and the superstitious; but many have sunk under its power, and many hath the testimony of a good conscience sustained and invigorated. It was this that supported Joseph under the gloom of a tedious imprissonment in a strange land, and under the false and malignant charge of an odious crime against an indulgent master; and it was this that wrung the heart of Herod amidst all the splendours of royalty, and all the gayeties of licentious pleasure. Conscience forced him to listen to its rebukes, and to writhe under its strokes, though elevated to a station where human censure could not reach him, and though professing a creed which admitted not of a judgment to come.

Injustice, too, has often been punished in men's worldly circumstances. Riches acquired by improper methods yield not in possession the satisfaction which was anticipated. They are often lost by the very methods which are used to increase or to secure them; and the grief at parting with them is always aggravated by bitter reflection on the sacrifices which were made to acquire them. It is seldom that those who acquire wealth by fraudulent methods live long to enjoy it.—"As the partridge sitteth upon her eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool."*

God has sometimes punished this sin by bringing wasting sickness and pain on the body; and dreadful is that disease which is thus sent to correct man for his iniquity. He can make a sick chamber dreary

* Jer. xvii. 11.

and horrible as a prison. The sick bed of the pious and the upright is darkened by no fear, and disturbed by no remorse. Should any reproach be cast on their name in the course of their life, they find it no difficult matter to convince the candid of its injustice; their behaviour afterwards produces a universal impression that they have been basely slandered, and when they come to die, their rejoicing is this, the testimony of a conscience void of offence towards God and man, that in simplicity and in godly sincerity they have had their conversation in the world. Their memory and their rest they know will be that of the just, and sweet is the one and blessed is the other.—But grief and shame have preyed on the heart of the sinner; and the idea that their character is blasted has been to them insupportable. But terrible as these visitations are, they are the mere preludes of the damnation of hell, and most strongly do they enforce the call which shall soon be heard for the last time, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." *

To conclude. My object, in this discourse, has not been to excite suspicions of the integrity of the upright servant, but to warn where admonition is necessary. The injunction to Titus, Paul knew to be needful, and it must be obeyed. "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not

* Isaiah lv. 7.

purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."*

Let masters set a uniform example of just and generous conduct before their servants. This may not influence them in all cases, but in general it will. Let the property of strangers who come to visit you be as sacred as your own; and let not servants have any reason to think, that if they touch not what belongs to you, you will not care though they defraud or extort from a stranger. Inculcate upon servants a strict regard to truth, and let them see that you will pardon almost any fault sooner than a lie.—Where the regard you owe to the community calls for the punishment of a wicked servant, be not restrained from it by a false lenity. Be more ready to reward the good than to censure the bad. Let there be nought in your families, the disclosure of which you have reason to dread from their revenge. How poor is his security for reputation whose good name lies at a servant's mercy! And let it be your great desire to be like him of whom God thus speaks: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."†

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* Titus ii. 9, 10. † Gen. xviii. 19.

DISCOURSE XVII.

THE REGARD DUE TO OUR OWN AND A FATHER'S FRIEND.

PROV. xxvii. 10.—*Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.*

THE cautions of Scripture are pointed with wonderful address against those vicious habits and practices to which we are naturally prone. An accurate examination of them will not fail to convince the candid and the discerning, that they must have proceeded from Him who knows what is in man. Men are often unsteady in their attachments; familiarity deadens their sensibility to the most brilliant qualities, and the lapse of time often effaces from the heart the most valuable favours. New objects have powerful attractions to the attentions of many; and, under the fascinating influence of novelty, what was before deemed worthy of high estimation is now regarded with indifference or disgust. This fluctuation in friendship is disgraceful to man as an intelligent being, and exhibits him as guided not by reason but caprice; it brings discredit on a connexion intended by Providence for the culture of the benevolent affections, and deprives us of its most important benefits.

It is against this fickleness that the admonition in the text is pointed; and it is one of the many verses which may be brought forward from this book to

shew, that the morality which it inculcates is not cold, sordid, and selfish, but comprehends and stimulates all the kind affections. It is only the folly of romance, or the presumption of enthusiasm, which will scorn the moral counsels and maxims of experience, because they do not sanction their vain dreams or their wild extravagance. If the industrious may learn from Solomon's lessons, persevering toil and a vigilant economy, friends are taught by him prudence, tenderness, and stability, in all their attachments.

In the words of the text, the friend of a father may be viewed as the same or as a different person from our own friend. If we have selected friends of our own age and circle, yet the friends of our father must never be forgotten or disregarded. A place, nay, a high place in our heart must be kept sacred for him. If the friend of a father has, by the amiable qualities of his character, or by a series of great and disinterested services, engaged our love, we will feel ourselves bound to him by a double tie, and our desertion of him would be an act of aggravated ingratitude and perfidy.

In this discourse, I shall explain the precept in the text, and recommend the practice of it by the motives which it suggests.

I. This precept calls on us to cherish for a friend unabated affection. A friend loveth at all times; and this is absolutely necessary to the proper discharge of the duties of friendship. If the heart is alienated, these will either be neglected altogether, or be performed in so partial and careless a manner as to be

neither pleasant nor beneficial. Offences must needs come. We may discover, in the course of intimate acquaintance, imperfections and foibles which we did not suspect, yet if he is worthy of being loved as a friend, he will have many excellences to be put in the balance against them; and reflection on these will conquer the disgust which was excited by the detection of his failings, Providence may lead you into closer connexion with others, yet the heart is not so narrow as that old attachments must be excluded to make room for new ones. No wise and good man can wish you to discard a respectable associate that you may attach yourself to him; and it is no indication that our gratitude is of a genuine kind when, in its regard for a recent benefit, it loses sight of all the former favours of others.

Tale-bearers may attempt to separate you. A tale-bearer, if listened to, will separate even chief friends; but to lend an ear to the insinuations and whispers of envy and malevolence is a proof of weakness and baseness of mind. If such a viper is permitted to enter the bower of friendship, its hisses will soon make it solitary. The tale-bearer will invent incidents and sayings to answer his purposes, if he can find none which he can employ to raise contention; and by those who are weak and wicked enough to encourage his communications, it should be remembered that he will carry away as much as he brings.

Nor must change of circumstances alienate our hearts from our friends, whether the alteration be in ours or in theirs. The man who was your companion in poverty, will be your best monitor amidst the dan-

gers of affluence. The parasites who flock around the wealthy may labour to make you ashamed of him, and to induce you to turn away from him, but it will be the greatest folly to listen to their suggestions. You cannot take a more likely way to provoke the Almighty to blast your prosperity, than to act thus to your friends; and while it will subject you to the bitterest censure from the world, it will bring upon you such condemnation from your own hearts as cannot be repelled by any pretext or apology which pride can suggest. If the change is in their circumstances, virtue dignifying poverty, defying the fury of the oppressor, and reclining in tranquil resignation on the bed of sickness, will give them new claims to your admiration and regard. It is then that they will feel the value of your friendship, that your visits, your language of kindness, and your efforts to serve them, will appear most noble in their eyes, and that they will bless God, that, amidst all the losses which they have sustained, your heart remains theirs.

This precept calls on you also to persevere in doing them all the kind offices of friendship. Sympathy in affliction is one of these offices which we must be ready to discharge. If they meet with many misfortunes, you must not say that friendship yields you nothing but sighing and lamentation, that you will leave them to the condolence of others, and that you will try what the mansion of cheerfulness can do to elevate your heart, for the image of your neglected friend pining in solitude will follow and upbraid you. In thus sympathizing with them, you will confirm

their attachment to you, and will assuredly be rewarded in the experience of that pleasure which is felt in the exercise of every benevolent affection—"Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."*

It is an office of friendship to admonish and to reprove when it is necessary; and in this you must persevere even though no reformation may follow your efforts, and though they should be requited with anger and scorn. Calm reflection may convince them of the kindness of your intentions, and induce them to correct the improprieties which called forth your rebuke.

To support the respectability and the good name of your friends, when envy and malice labour to blast them, is another office of friendship. Though their calumniators should be ever so many, and ever so bitter, and though they may meet with general countenance, you must glory to shew that your conviction of their worth was too well-grounded to be easily shaken. It is a resolution which marks a noble and ardent generosity. "Innocence shall never want a vindicator, nor merit an advocate, while I have a tongue to speak or a heart to feel." By this conduct you may direct the virulence of the slanderer against yourself; and from an apprehension of this kind many are silent when they ought to vindicate those who are aspersed; but Providence will not permit you to suffer materially by your generous interference, and you

* Eccl. vii. 3.

will soon find that the influence of the evil speaker is but of short continuance.

I may add, that it is an office of friendship to labour to promote the spiritual and the temporal welfare of our friends; and in this we must persevere, even though they should fail in the gratitude which we expected, and though it should require more severe exertion than we at first supposed should be necessary. Affection can make the service of years seem as but that of a few days. I know no consideration which can have so powerful an influence in inducing us to persevere in kindnesses to our friends as the conduct of him who went about doing good, and who lived and died for the salvation of those who were enemies to him in their minds, and by wicked works. When this was done for enemies, shall the little we can give or do be withheld from friends?

Such seems the import of the admonition in the text, and the friend who hath a claim for all this kindness is he only with whose excellence we are intimately acquainted. The rash and hasty friendships which are often formed by the young, contract and sour the heart by their speedy termination, or involve in vice and ruin those who are fascinated by the specious libertine. A genteel appearance and address, a gay temper, a courteous manner, and a knowledge of fashionable life, often disguise the villany which marks the innocence or the fortune of the simple for its prey. Many a young man hath been destroyed by such a friendship. He was once the hope and the darling of his family; now they wish to forget that

ever he was theirs. In the choice of your friends you must act with the utmost caution, and ere you fix your regards, even on persons of the highest repute, implore his guidance who searches the heart. Beseech him to keep you from entertaining prejudices against any, and while he expands your heart in benevolence to all, that he may direct you to such friends as will, the longer they are known, appear the more worthy of your regard, and with whom you may cherish the hope of being eternally associated in your Father's house. Friendship, founded in wisdom and sanctioned by religion, shall not be like the grass on the house top, which withers ere it is grown, and with which the mower fills not his hand, nor the binder of sheaves his bosom; but like the bud which opens into the blossom, and ripens into a fruit delicious and wholesome, gathered in the autumn, and refreshing in the winter of the year.

II. I proceed now, in the second place, to enforce this conduct by the motives which are suggested by the text.

1. Many considerations to influence you to this conduct are suggested by the phrase, "Thine own friend." By selecting him as your friend you pledged yourself to stand by him; and though the forfeiture of such a pledge may not subject you to punishment from men, you shall be chastised for it by the condemnation of your own heart, and he must view it with abhorrence who is the faithful God keeping covenant and mercy for ever.

Consider also the disgrace to which forsaking a

friend will subject you. The world will blame you for a want of judgment in your choice, or a want of steadiness and integrity of character. Indulgent as the world is to some offences, it attaches peculiar baseness to perfidy of this sort; and should you be treated by others in the way in which you have acted, not a sentiment of pity will be felt for you, and your own hearts will tell you that you deserve none.

And think on the anguish such a desertion must give to the man whom you have loved and treated as a friend. He will be more deeply wounded by your unkindness than by all the neglect and ill-usage of the world. Figure him weeping in secret places for your treachery, and lifting up to Heaven the pathetic lamentation of David,—"It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company."* And will you bring a cloud over that face which your soothing attentions used to brighten, or fill those eyes with tears from which you have so often wiped them away? Will you cover that dwelling with gloom which you have so often enlivened, or lacerate that heart which you delighted to bless?

Consider also, that your unfaithfulness to him may be punished by the unfaithfulness of others to you.

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* Psalm lv. 12—14.

His pangs are a pledge of what you must shortly feel; and with no decency will you complain of the perfidy of others, or solicit the sympathy of the world, when you are thus tried. Remorse and shame will make you silent, or cause this reflection to pass from your lips,—"As I have done to them, so the Lord hath requited me." Consider further, that thus you will lose the benefits which you might otherwise have derived from his friendship. Christian charity may lead him to forgive your forsaking him, and he may use efforts to rekindle your attachment; but if he is successful, his experience of your instability will make it impossible for him to confide in you; and if he does not succeed, your treachery may turn the most patient kindness into enmity, and the very place where you might have found an asylum from calamity and reproach may become the scene of hostility against you.

Reflect also, that fidelity is mentioned by our Saviour as one of the weightier matters of the law,* and that this was a virtue which was conspicuous in his own character. Though his disciples had few claims to his regard, though there were many failings in their temper and conduct calculated to excite disgust, and though they shewed, on various occasions, a most unworthy selfishness, yet having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end, and this is the promise which he hath given for the comfort of his people; "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."†

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* Matt. xxiii. 23. † Heb. xiii. 5.

2. Consider the motives which urge you to a steadfast kindness to your father's friend. Reverence for a father will prompt us to treat those whom he loved with respect. You may indeed attach yourselves to persons of the same age, attainments, and pursuits with you, yet you ought to cleave to those whom your father esteemed and regarded. If your father is living he will prize such conduct as a testimony of your veneration for himself. It will delight him to see you listening to that wisdom which has been a light to his feet, and eager to make those happy to whom he feels himself under obligations which he can never repay. In your kindness he will be still requiting them; on the other hand, contempt of his friends will fill him with disquietude and irritation, and with the most painful fears of your disregarding in other instances his counsels and his wishes. If your father is dead it is a gross insult to his memory to turn your back on the man who was the comforter of his last hour, and whose tears were mingled with yours at his grave. How can such a son approach the tomb of a father who has offered such an indignity to the kind affections of the heart that moulders within it! and no pleasing recollections can he have of a departed father whose conscience utters its voice in fierce accusation whenever his thoughts are turned to this subject.

Attention to a father's friend will mitigate the bitterness of filial sorrow. You say, "What would I give if my father could share my prosperity, and if, by my dutiful attentions, I could make amends to him for my peevishness and disobedience." In his friend

you have a fit object to gratify your solicitude. Let him hear from your lips those sentiments of kindness which the voice of your father would have uttered, and receive from your hands those benefits which he would have delighted to minister, and you may be assured that the impression of the Redeemer is common to all his people, that what is done to those whom he regards is considered as done to himself.

To a virtuous heart there is something inexpressibly interesting in the idea of a father's friend. The tree under which a father reclined, the books he delighted to peruse, the passages which he has marked as peculiarly the objects of his admiration, we view with veneration, and their loss we should regard as a bitter misfortune; and has not his friend stronger claims to our kindest notice? To these objects our neglect can give no uneasiness, but such a man must feel acute anguish when he is neglected or treated harshly in a place where he was welcomed with the kindest smile, and where, in the confidence of friendship, he considered himself at home. But think on the joy it will give him to find you actuated by a father's spirit, and how honourable it will be to you when he is heard saying, "I will weep no more over my departed friend; I see his amiable spirit breathing in his children; I have regained all of which death deprived me, and I have found a heart equal in tenderness and constancy to that which the grave is consuming!" It is common for men to feel and to say at the death of a friend, that they do not expect to find one so much attached to them as the departed; and how delightful

must it be to meet such a one in the very dwelling where our hearts loved to rest!

Meditate on the advantages which you may derive from such a man. Days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom. Their stores of experience will qualify them to instruct, to warn, and to guide you, and though they may have less ardour, they have more steadiness than a more youthful friend. Such a friend is well tried, and sagacity and experience are qualities far superior to the most dazzling accomplishments. Attachment to thy father, and attachment to thyself, will bind him to thy interests, and create a generous solicitude to promote them which no obstacles shall be able to repress.

It is a natural wish to be buried by the grave of a father and a mother, that our bones and dust may be mingled with theirs; but it will fill you with regret in dying if you have not cherished their spirit, and cover you with confusion when you meet them in judgment, if you have been ungrateful and unkind to the friend whom they loved as their own souls. How insufficient will all your apologies for such conduct appear when they shall be examined by Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and in the presence of those whose earnest wishes had so little influence on you!

I conclude this part of the subject by directing your attention to two places of Scripture where this precept is enforced in the most striking manner. Behold Solomon seated on his throne, and amid the vengeance which he executed on those who had conspired against him, saying to Abiathar the priest,—

"Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted."* Contrast with this the conduct of his son Rehoboam, who forsook the council of the old men who stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and listened to those who flattered his pride and encouraged him in oppression. And what was the consequence? The filial piety and wise generosity of Solomon was rewarded in a peaceful and prosperous reign, while the folly and the haughtiness of Rehoboam, and his contempt of the wise suggestions of his father's counsellors, were punished in the revolt of his subjects, in the dismemberment of his kingdom, and in the unhappiness of his whole reign.†

Let me now suggest some directions which may assist you in complying with this precept. Let your friendship be attracted by the qualities of genuine Christianity. What these are you see in the characters of the wisdom that cometh from above, "which is pure and peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." The glittering accomplishments of the vain and the frivolous never appear so worthless as when compared with these. Mistake not sanctimony for this purity, tameness and facility for this gentleness, and plausibleness and indiscriminate liberality for those other qualities. Cul-

* 1 Kings ii. 26. † 1 Kings xii.

tivate that just discernment, and that delicacy of moral taste, which will lead you always to approve the things which are more excellent.

Beware of the indulgence of those tempers which lead to instability in friendship; such as anger, pride, envy, and extravagant expectations of pleasure from the society, or benefit from the services of our friends. Anger and envy kindle a fire in the heart which destroys the sentiments and feelings of benignity and kindness, while pride is a principle more destructive to the softer impressions of benevolence than the mildew to the tender herb. Remember how often unexpected occurrences have prevented you from fulfilling the wishes of others, and you will be disposed to avoid all severe reflections when they fail in doing what you expected.

Cultivate those tempers which will establish your hearts in friendship; such as meekness, patience, candour, fortitude, and wisdom. Meekness will keep you from being easily provoked; patience suffereth long and is kind; candour will put the best construction on the language and conduct of friends; fortitude will make you disregard the threats which may be employed to detach you from them; and wisdom will enable you to discern the first symptoms of alienation, and carefully to remove them. Pray for the influences of the Spirit of peace and love. Jesus in his intercession solicits this in behalf of his church, and we will be ashamed to indulge a contentious spirit while we put up such prayers, or to refuse to follow after the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another. And while we put

up such prayers, let us do it with shame and grief on account of that malignity which he alone can conquer.

Think how soon death shall separate you. The arms of friendship are no sanctuary from the last enemy. Soon shall that eye cease to sparkle, and that heart to throb at your approach; and soon shall that face which ardent affection adorns with its glowing expression be pale as the ashes and cold as the clay. Why then should we now separate from each other? Why should we not cleave to each other with purpose of heart? Let us dwell, and let us walk with each other as heirs of the grace of life, thus brightening our abode, and smoothing our path by the attentions and endearments of friendship, and we shall part in death to meet in heaven.

I cannot conclude this discourse without stating how powerfully this subject enforces constancy in our regard to the Lord Jesus Christ. Of his friendship to us he hath given the most valuable testimonies. These are beautifully specified by the apostle John in that doxology which hath so often expressed the obligations which Christians feel to their Lord:—"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."* And can we forsake him? If we do, we cannot injure him, but we will shew ourselves to be creatures lost to gratitude and to truth, and will bring upon ourselves swift destruction.

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* Rev. i. 5, 6.

But he is also our father's friend. Call to your remembrance how the suggestions of his Spirit relieved them in perplexity; the expression of his sympathy tranquillized them in sorrow; and the light of his countenance put gladness into their hearts. Some of you can remember the tenderness with which he soothed them in their last moments, and the kindness with which he upheld them in the swellings of Jordan. You could only mourn and weep on its banks; you could only pray, "Let not the deep swallow them up;" you could only with a broken voice remind them of the promise, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee;" but he fulfilled it, and suffered not their feet to slide. You heard their last exclamation, "It is the voice of my beloved, behold he cometh." "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord;"* and in this language you marked their entrance into his joy. You heard their dying charge,—"Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind." And can you abandon such a friend?

But he is thy father's friend still. In him their

* 2 Tim. i. 12. Rom. viii. 38, 39.

bodies sleep, and with him their souls are happy. He is not ashamed to acknowledge them as his friends in heaven; and so far is his kindness from being exhausted by what it did for them on earth, that he wipes away all tears from their eyes, and crowns them with everlasting glory. And doth not this call on us to abide in him constantly? If we forsake him he will cast us into outer darkness; but if we adhere to him, he will say to us,—"As I was with thy father, so will I also be with thee, I will never fail thee nor forsake thee." We know what blessings his presence yielded, and to what rest his friendship led; and by this assurance we are encouraged and warranted to say,—"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."* You are hastening to eternity, and happy will it be if he shall say to your fathers when you are dying,—"Go, receive the child of your hopes, and the friend of my love, into everlasting habitations, that where I am they, as well as you, may be also." As they perform this delightful office, they will look to him as their God, and the God of their seed, and say, "Behold I and the children whom thou hast given me;" while you will say, "Thou art my God, and I will praise thee, my father's God, and I will exalt thee."

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* Psalm xxiii. 6.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

THE SWEETNESS OF THE LABOURER'S SLEEP.

Eccl. v. 12.—*The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.*

The unequal distribution of the advantages of life has often produced the most unhappy effects on the minds of superficial observers. It has led some to question the reality of a superintending Providence, and others to deny the moral perfections of the Ruler of the universe. The rich, in the vanity of prosperity, have formed many foolish conceits of the partiality of Heaven to them, and many presumptuous hopes as to their future condition; and the poor, groaning under hardships unknown to their wealthy neighbours, have murmured against God, and by discontent and repining have greatly embittered the afflictions of their lot. But were the ways of Heaven examined more carefully, and in a humble and pious temper, the conviction would sooner or later be produced in the mind, —that though clouds and darkness are round about Jehovah, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

To the superficial observer, nothing presents itself in the condition of the lower classes of society but their straits and privations, their toils and cares; and nought does he discern in that of the rich, but their

ease and their luxuries, their influence and their splendour; yet the man of reflection and experience discovers advantages on the side of the former, and mortifications on that of the latter, which fully satisfy him that the ways of the Lord are equal. A benignant Providence makes springs of water to arise in the weary land, while the folly and the pride of man bring blasting and mildew over the scene of beauty.

Our text presents us with one of the peculiar comforts of the virtuous labourer, and the due consideration of it will shew how much superior his lot is to that of the selfish and opulent voluptuary. Sleep is the kind appointment of Heaven, which takes away at least one-third part of the duration of our afflictions. Through the day the burden may be heavy, but sleep will close the eye that is a fountain of tears, and "steep all the senses in forgetfulness." There have been tyrants who have attempted to keep their victims from sleep by various expedients of torture; but while the heart shudders at such cruelty, let it glow with a lively sense of His goodness who gives every night a season of repose to all his creatures. Some may think that their sleep only deserves notice who stretch themselves on beds of down in splendid apartments, but the text intimates, that sweeter is that sleep which is got on the homely pallet. Sleep is one of the many circumstances in human life in which the rich and the poor meet together, and in which the advantage will be found on the side of the labouring classes. In its regular recurrence, and in the ample refreshment which it yields, they may trace the unwearied kindness of God in mitigating the hardships

of their lot, and in strengthening them for its duties. It is my object to confirm and illustrate this position in this discourse; and I trust it will be found useful for promoting industry and contentment among the poor, and the spirit of religion among the rich.

It may be necessary for me to state, before I go farther, that by the labouring man spoken of in the text is meant the labourer who is honest, contented, and industrious. The poor man who is guilty of injustice, who, to supply his wants more fully, commits depredations on the property of others, or purloins the goods of those who employ him, must be a stranger to the calm and sweet slumbers of the upright. The consciousness of guilt, and the fear of detection and of punishment, will make him spend the night in trembling and sorrow. Even where a long course of crime has hardened the heart, and matured him into the audacious villain, conscience will assert its power in his slumbers; and he who before his associates can defy the vengeance of God and man, and sport with all the denunciations of present or of future retribution, in the hour of sleep feels the terrors of eternity. He must be contented also, for he might as well attempt to sleep on a heap of thorns, as with envy and impatience rankling in his heart. What can close the evil eye; or, at least, I may say, what can keep it long closed? He must be industrious too; for if he is a sluggard, the miseries of those dependent on him must suggest to him uneasy reflections, and the cries of their hunger must keep him awake.

I must state also, that the rich spoken of in the text are selfish and luxurious worldlings. The rich man

who goes about doing good, will be lulled to rest by the blessings of those ready to perish. The delightful consciousness of the comfort he has imparted, and the exertions he has made in his labours of love, will most effectually dispose both the body and the mind for peaceful slumber. The text speaks of the rich man who amasses riches and keeps them for himself; and it is this man, who, in the righteous judgment of God, is tormented by the wealth he was so eager to acquire and so unwilling to distribute.

1. The toils of the labouring man prepare him for sleep. If, as the shadows of the evening are stretching out, he feels the languor of fatigue on his spirits, and his arms stiff and weary, he knows that thus his bed will be the more pleasing. Sleep comes to him unsolicited; it requires not that his chamber should be finer or his bed more soft; the naked walls of his dwelling, and the straw-covered boards on which his limbs are stretched, keep not sleep one moment away. Sleep strengthens the weak hands and confirms the feeble knees; and the good man arises refreshed in mind and body, like a plant fresh and beautiful from the nightly dew.

On the other hand, the rich man, who has no employment to occupy his faculties, and no necessity to stimulate him to exertion, is a miserable being. His days are wearisome days, and his nights wearisome nights!—he retires to his bed, but it is long ere sleep will come to him,—the more he strives to meet with it, the farther does it flee from him; and often is the labourer rising cheerful and vigorous to renew his toil ere he has closed his eyes. He is unwilling to

leave his couch in the morning, and continues to doze on in slumbers, by which the body is relaxed, and the mind is confused and enfeebled. From the lips of such men the complaint is often heard, how severely the head aches, and how languid and stupid they are, while the labourer is whistling at his plough, and the mechanic is plying his work with vigour and joy.

2. The moderation of the labouring man keeps his sleep undisturbed. His active and regular habits of life maintain the powers both of the body and of the mind in a sound and healthy state. His food, though coarse, is wholesome and easily digested ; nor does a stomach oppressed and disordered debar his eyes from rest, or excite the fancy to horrible dreams. Approach to the bed where he slumbers, and mark how quiet is his rest, and how calm and sweet is the expression of his countenance. Whatever you may deem him when at his toils through the day, you cannot but think him happy now. There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.

Many are the considerations by which temperance has been enforced. The tendency of excess to cloud the mind, to inflame the passions, to injure the health, and to waste the substance, and its degradation of man as an intellectual and immortal being, have been often urged by the moralist to enforce sobriety ; but the text presents to us an additional consideration, namely, its tendency to bless so great a proportion of life as that which is occupied in sleep. To such a man it is indeed a happy season, when peace blesses the mind and rest the body.

How different is the case with the rich voluptuary !

his slumbers are broken by the feverish inquietude of his body, and by nature struggling under the load he has imposed on it. Scarcely has he closed his eyes ere he awakes in horror, and the same series of slumbering and awakening is repeated, till the advance of day summons him from a couch where he has been suffering in part the punishment of his folly. Yet even this will not teach him the necessity of temperance; he pursues the same career till nature, no longer able to shake off the burdens with which it has been overcharged by surfeiting and drunkenness, is relieved from them at once by the hand of death.

3. The rich man's sleep is marred by cares and fears from which that of the labourer is free. Many are the anxieties of the rich man about the way in which he should dispose of his wealth, and how he should turn it to the best advantage. Many are his fears lest those to whom he intrusts it should prove unfaithful,—lest thieves should break through and steal, or lest, in some violent convulsion of popular fury, it should attract the feet of the plunderer and of the incendiary to his dwelling. In times such as these, fears of this description will be ridiculed by none as irrational. Many rich men have been brought low by the failure of their connexions; and many who once were clothed in purple and scarlet, and fared sumptuously every day, have been supported by the charity of strangers in a foreign land. We have seen, in our own country, embarrassment and distress going from one class of the community to the other. Merchants, whose trade and opulence were rapidly extending, have, by the stagnation of com-

merce, and by various disasters, been involved in great difficulties, and see nothing before them but ruin; while the landholder, enriched by the ample returns of his farms, must part with the gain of former days, and finds his prosperity more swift in its fall than its rise. Many are the rich man's fears lest the wealth which he has so carefully collected should be dissipated by his children, and the family he has done so much to raise, sink into obscurity. Instances of this, which the history of the world, or his own observation, present to him, press upon his attention; every tendency to profusion in his children excites his dark forebodings, while the means which he employs to check it, and to form them to his own penurious habits, only strengthen the inclination to prodigality, and sharpen their invention to find out the means of indulgence. And how bitter to such a man is the idea of the separation of death, and of the account of judgment! Go where he will on this earth he may take his wealth with him; but at the gate by which he passes from time into eternity, he is told that he can carry nothing hence. Nought of this world's riches shall ever be found again, but what was cast on the waters of charity. No man can call the rich to account here for the use which they make of their wealth, but God will. Their wealth was given them with that charge, "Occupy till I come;" and though they were so stupid as neither to mark the hand which gave the one, nor the voice which uttered the other, the day of reckoning shall come. "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened;—and the dead were judged out

of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."* Grace is the only distinction which shall then exist or avail.

Now, when thoughts of this kind visit the rich man in the silence of the night,—when imagination sets before him death stripping him of all, and judgment dooming him to the vengeance of eternal fire, it is impossible that he can sleep quietly. Who would take his couch, though decked with coverings of tapestry, and perfumed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon, when thus surrounded by the powers of the world to come?

On the other hand, the pious labourer has no cares but such as he can cast on God. He rests in peace, for he knows that in the poor man's dwelling there is nought to allure the rapacious. He is conscious, that while health is continued, he will be able, by the Divine blessing, to provide things honest in the sight of all men,—that when he fails, the children whom he has taught to labour will cheerfully support him, and that death will convey him to the heavenly rest.

Persons in affluent circumstances are apt to imagine that the mind of the labourer must be harassed by continual cares; but no supposition is more groundless. The wants of nature are few, and much is not required to satisfy them. The cravings of corrupt appetites are seldom heard in his heart; and when they do rise they are as quickly repressed. He has such a continued experience of the goodness of God in giving him day by day his daily bread, that he

* Rev. xx. 12.

feels that solicitude would be both foolish and ungrateful. Slight is the hold which this earth hath of his heart, and it is no sacrifice for him to quit it; and knowing that the Judge in his glory still remembers his once lowly state, and is delighted with those who adorn it with his meekness, patience, and activity, he expects his coming with no dread of his scorn or his fury.

4. The rich man's sleep is often embittered by disagreeable reflections, from which that of the labouring man is free. The employment of the virtuous labourer is such as to produce in his mind all those agreeable reflections which are adapted to direct the imagination to pleasing scenes. The consciousness of having performed the duties of his calling, the affectionate conduct of a grateful family, and the hope of the divine protection to all that he calls his, must sweetly tranquillize the mind. How beautifully is the influence of piety and wisdom on the safety of life, and on sleep, represented by Solomon! "My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion: so shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet."* Such a man hath not, like those of a different character, to regret false steps which he has taken, but cannot now retrace, enmities he has excited but cannot allay, and efforts to better his situation to the prejudice of others.

* Prov. iii. 21—24.

On the other hand, if riches have been acquired by unlawful means, the curses of the widow and the orphan sound dreadfully when heard during the silence of midnight If our hearts are set on them, however innocently they may have been got,—if the acquisition of them had engrossed all our labour, while the eternal interests of our souls have been neglected, —these questions of our Lord must excite very painful feelings, and engage the mind in a train of alarming contemplation, when the exhausted body has sunk asleep: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

The injuries which men in high station have done to others are more extended than those inflicted in a humble sphere, and must call forth a more severe remorse. What a contrast is presented to us by the state of Darius and Daniel! Behold Darius in his palace: he passes the night fasting, neither are instruments of music brought before him; and his sleep goes from him. No art could bring calmness to his mind, nor peace to his pillow; while Daniel in the den of lions is not only as safe, but as tranquil, as when in his chamber. Instead of tearing him by their fangs, or disturbing him by their roar, they slumber in peace by his side, while he reposes under the guardian care of the angel of his God.

5. The evening sacrifice of domestic religion has a happy tendency to bring the mind into such a state

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* Matt. xvi. 26.

as must render our slumber sweet. A pious family, joining in penitential acknowledgment of the sins of the past day,—in earnest solicitation for the protection of the Almighty through the dark and silent watches of the night,—in the holy contemplation of his character and ways, as represented in his word,—and in the expression of benevolent desire for the welfare of their friends and neighbours,—must, by such an exercise, have their minds settled in soft tranquillity. Its result is not that rapture which is too vehement and tumultuous to admit of repose, but a peace in which the mind rests on God ; and no entertainment is there in all the circle of fashionable gayety which can be compared with this in its power to sooth.

Private devotion, which follows that of the family, has a tendency to strengthen all those pious impressions which are so friendly to peace ; and in those waking periods which come occasionally to all, and in which the vacant mind flies from one subject to another for amusement, or murmurs in foolish impatience that the eyes are debarred from sleep, good men occupy themselves in contemplations and purposes delightful and advantageous. Then the mind is neither distracted by the bustle of the world, nor impeded by any material object ; but, left alone with God, beholds his glory in the darkness, and hears his voice in the silence of the night. Pursuing its free course, it seeks and finds its rest in God. It was the felicity which David had experienced at such periods which made him utter these anticipations, " My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when I

remember thee on my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."* It is not of the sanctuary and its worship that he speaks as the scene of his delight, nor of public intercourse with the pious, though in both of these he had experienced much holy satisfaction; but of the midnight musings of devout meditation. These bring such objects to the mind, that, when the good sink into slumber, they appear again before it in a brighter form, and with more captivating beauty. Their hope hath no check in its flight, their affection no damp in its movements.

Contrast the man who devises wicked imaginations on his bed, or him who quakes at every sound that reaches his ear, and whose fancy surrounds his couch with spectres, with him who is then employed in searching his heart and trying his ways. He communes with his own heart on his bed, and is still. The tear of contrition which drops on his pillow, and the cry for mercy prompted by faith and hope, are known to him who dwells in the thick darkness. Relieved as the heart is by repentance, and soothed by hope, sleep comes to such a man as a messenger of peace.

6. There is a special blessing of Heaven on the slumbers of the good. "He giveth his beloved sleep."† How delightful is the confidence of this in which good men retire to rest! "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." The infant that falls asleep in its mother's arms, or in its cradle, where a mother's

* Psalm lxiii. 5, 6. † Psalm cxxvii. 2.

hands have fenced it from cold, and where her softest tones have lulled it to rest, is an image of a good man falling asleep under the protection of Heaven. But how wide is the difference! The infant is in a great measure unconscious of all this care; but the good man feels it, and rejoices in it. Feeble is the arm of human protection, and dim its eye, in comparison with that of Israel's Keeper. How sweetly does David reflect on the goodness of God to him in this way! "I laid me down and slept; I awaked: for the Lord sustained me."* He thinks not of the soft couch which was beneath him, nor of the valiant men who surrounded his bed; but this was his delightful reflection, that the eternal God was his refuge, and that underneath him were the everlasting arms.

The love of God imparts a peculiar relish to the common mercies of life. As the good man's pittance is better than the miser's wealth, and his homely fare than the dainties of the luxurious, so there is something sweet in his slumbers with which a stranger doth not intermeddle. A Father's hand closes his eyes, and the last sound which he hears is the voice of a Father. He knows, that while he sleeps his Father watches by his side, and that his loving kindness will suggest in the morning such reflections as these: "How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God! how great is the sum of them! When I awake, I am still with thee." So calm and so sweet is the sleep which he can give, that the slumbers of martyrs have been marked with envy by those who

* Psalm iii. 5.

were preparing for them the instruments of death. They have slept as serenely within a few hours of their execution as ever they did in the course of their life.

But no such blessing is on the slumber of the wicked. Evil spirits, whom God will not suffer to approach his saints, have free access for their suggestions to the imaginations of the bad; and no heavenly Protector is nigh to keep them from the terror by night. If even Job had to say, when God tried his faith and patience, "When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions;"* let us think what horror he can excite in the minds of the wicked, and how he can make them feel a hell begun. No promise from heaven encourages the fearful heart, and no soft influence of the Spirit of peace sets the quivering flesh at rest. The good man's slumbers are kept in perfect peace, for "his mind is stayed on God."

CONCLUSION.

1. This subject calls on the religious poor to be contented with such things as they have. A third part of your continuance on earth is spent in a manner far more delightful than that in which their nights pass away who know not God; and when you think on an eternity of happiness as before you, and an eternity of misery as before the wicked, you will feel that you ought not to repine though your days were all clouded

* Job vii. 13, 14.

by sorrow, while theirs shone with the brightest blaze of joy. But I hesitate not to say that your days are happier than theirs. If you have not their wealth, you have not their anxieties; and if you have more toil, you have more real enjoyment. Sigh not then that you cannot accompany them in their gay career. Even angels look on you with delight in your humble course, and rejoice in the hope of your rising to join them. To you the singing of the birds is the melody of your Father's house, and the glories of the summer are the characters of his benignity. The Bible makes known to you the unsearchable riches of Christ; and from his fulness you receive grace seasonably and amply. How unreasonable then is discontent! Shall you awake from the silence of so sweet a sleep to complain? The mercies of your nights are assuredly sufficient to deserve the praises of your days. You are saying, "I am resolved they shall call them forth. Pardon, O Father, what is past: I will bless thee at all times to come."

2. How little reason is there to envy the rich who are irreligious! Do not form your opinion of them from their appearance by day; for could you see them by night, you would behold that gay countenance distorted by anger, or disgust, or terror. Tell me not what their wealth can procure them: it cannot procure them the labourer's sleep. You may, in visiting the rich man's palace through the day, mark the chamber where he sleeps, and think how sweetly he may slumber who has a place of rest so soft. But soon does familiarity render a man insensible to the charms of the finest paintings and of the most gor-

geous furniture; and could you behold him at night, you might see him tortured on that bed as on a rack, and wishing that it were morning, that he might be rid of the horrors that torment him. Envy him not, but pray for him, for he needs your prayers. Think on this faithful picture, to teach you to pity him, and to be jealous over yourselves. "Deliver me from men of the world, O Lord, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasures: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes." * Such is the sum of their happiness; and who would take it and incur their guilt and doom?

3. This subject strongly recommends labour. It is the labour of the good man that God rewards with these slumbers. Too many of the lower ranks discover an aversion from labour, and will rather cast themselves on public charity than work with their hands. They will use many pretexts to excuse themselves when they are urged to labour. They will pretend that they cannot find employment, or that they are subject to infirmities which render exertion impracticable. By such base pretences they offend God, and are viewed by those around them as persons as destitute of spirit as of truth. The days and nights of such persons must be miserable. The contempt of the respectable assails them wherever they go, and the wrath of God is revealed against them in the rags with which drowsiness covers them. The efforts

* Psalm xvii. 14.

which relatives make for such persons are made grudgingly, and soon cease. One article after another is pawned from their dwelling, till at last they have neither a bed for rest, nor clothes to cover them. He who would labour, yet cannot, we pity; but he that might labour, yet will not, is a cumberer of the ground, a burden under which all connected with him groan. Neither the love of God nor of their families dwells in such persons. Indolence leads to the vilest habits; and often is the time of the sluggard spent in gambling, and his reflections drowned in intemperance, while his children are left to the enticements which allure, or the privations which drive them to crimes. Such a representation, just though terrifying, will induce you to be diligent in business. In thus acting, you follow our Lord's example. The carpenter's toils were his for years; and the food which he could have brought by miracle for his mother and for himself was procured by the sweat of his brow and by the labour of his hands. Sweet were his slumbers after his toils; and all who labour in his spirit shall rest in his peace.

Finally. How sweet is that sleep which awaits the good when the toils of life are ended! "I heard a voice from heaven, saying, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." It is pleasing to think that our friends who are gone sleep, and more delightful still, that they sleep in Jesus. "How sweet is that sleep into which I am falling,—a sleep in Jesus!" was the language of a

good old minister* whom I saw on the day of his departure, whose melting seriousness as a preacher, and whose amiable manners as a man, made him be regarded with affectionate esteem, and whose calm demeanour in sickness and death accorded with the placid tenor of his whole life. The labours of life prepare the pious for this rest; and as they sink into it they can bless God that they have not lived in vain. They shall enter into peace, they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.

Let us take comfort from this thought in the death of our friends. That closed eye is only shut for a season; that silent tongue in due time shall speak; and that changed countenance shall glow with life and beauty. Let it cheer us also in the view of our own dissolution, and let us long for it as the hour of rest. To the righteous man dying is easy and pleasant work, and he can rejoice in hope that God will lift up his head from the pillow of the grave. Let us give all diligence to complete our task. The last hour brings sufficient terrors with it for the trial of nature; and why should the failing heart and flesh be tortured by remorse for indolence? By your hopes of happiness in your last hour, I entreat you to be active for God. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."†

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* The Rev. T. Waters, Alloa. † John ix. 4.

DISCOURSE XIX.*

THE BURIAL OF SARAH.

GENESIS xxiii. 3, 4.—*And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.*

IN this chapter we behold Abraham subjected to a new trial of his fortitude and confidence in God, by the death of Sarah, his wife. In the trial related in the preceding chapter, we behold these principles shining with unexampled splendour, and all the feelings of the father controlled by submission to the will of Heaven. In that scene the most sacred mysteries of religion were represented; those grand events were exhibited, by which, in the fulness of time, the redemption of man was to be accomplished; and a faith and obedience displayed which have been the wonder of ages, and whose moral influence hath given vigour, steadfastness, and hope to the heart in many an arduous struggle.

In the scene now before us, we see not so much of the elevation of the saint, but we see more of the sensibility of the man. The beauty, the piety, the respectful demeanour, and the affectionate attentions of

* This discourse, in an abridged form, was published by the author in the Christian Instructor for February 1814.

Sarah, endeared her to Abraham's heart. He was now called to behold the faithful companion of his journeys, the sharer of all his griefs, her whose smile gave to every place and to every enjoyment a charm, and with whom all his plans and prospects in life were connected in the tenderest association, expiring before his eyes. His distress on this occasion was so great, that the sacred writer, though remarkable for simplicity and conciseness of expression, tells us that he mourned for her, and that he wept for her. He who had ascended Moriah with so firm a step is now agitated by violent sorrow; the arm which had lifted the knife, to plunge it into his son's heart, now grasps the hand of Sarah, and will not let it go; and he who could look on Isaac with an eye so resolute, now bedews the face of his wife with tears. Here nature works: and who is there that can deride his anguish? Who is there that does not wish that religious comfort may come to sooth him? Behold, it comes; and Abraham, composed and strengthened by its influence, goes forth to make those preparations for Sarah's funeral which decency, prudence, and religion demanded. His conduct on this occasion is described in the text; and the contemplation of it may be useful, not only to the mourner, but to all classes of hearers, by the lessons and virtues which it exhibits.

In this discourse I shall point out the instructions which are suggested by the condition and the request of the patriarch.

I. Let us consider what lessons are suggested by Abraham's view of his situation and character. "He

said to the sons of Heth, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you."

1. It intimates that good men do not regard this world as their home. Abraham was not now in his native country. He had left Ur of the Chaldees at the call of God, and by faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country. And good men in all ages have considered themselves in this light. Like strangers, they are far from home, the home where their sweetest comforts lie, and where their dearest friends dwell. Heaven is the residence of their Father, of their elder Brother, and of the angels and saints, with whom grace has allied them.

However agreeable the situation of the sojourner may be, his thoughts often repair to the place he has left. Amid objects of far greater beauty and splendour, his heart carries him to the scene of his early sports, to the dwelling where he grew up amid the caresses and ministrations of maternal tenderness, and to the green sod under which his parents sleep; so the affections of the good are set on things above, and no attraction of wealth or pleasure can seduce their hearts from the contemplation and desire of heavenly things.

Like strangers, their stay here is short. Some have a longer abode in this world than others; but what is life, protracted to its utmost term, when compared with eternity? Yet, short as it is, much is to be done in it. While worldly men act as if there was no hereafter,—while their sole care is to embellish a scene which they must soon quit for ever,—good men consider it as the business of time to prepare for eternity, and wish to make every occupation the service of

their God, every duty a step to heaven, and every hour a memento of their last.

Like strangers, they do not adopt the manners or the habits of the men of the world, and interfere not further with its concerns than duty requires. They take no part in its levities, its follies, or cabals. It is not merely in the hideous excesses of intemperance and impurity that Christians will not engage, but in amusements where seriousness is ridiculed, in fashions immodest and fantastic, in entertainments luxurious and extravagant, in political intrigues and factions hostile to the peace and order of society, in schemes, whatever be their object, in which they should be hurried along by the restless and vehement speculator, and in pursuits unfriendly to the tranquillity and sober habits of domestic life. It may be said that there are many professors of religion who are not so timid, austere, and reserved, and who think it not inconsistent with their character to act and to enjoy themselves like others; but while good men have public duties to fulfil, and while there are pleasures which may be enjoyed with innocence, they must remember that they have not received the spirit of the world, that they must maintain their distinguishing characters as a peculiar people, and that they who are born from above have a different object in life from that of the carnal.

Like strangers, they are objects of jealousy and dislike to the men of the world. Their plans they consider as interfering with their gratifications, their mode of living as a condemnation of theirs, and even their attempts to do them good as originating in spir-

itual pride, and as intended to bring them completely under their power. With such impressions, it may be expected that they will labour to thwart their projects and to abridge their influence; that they will seize every pretext to darken their excellence, repel with insult their most benevolent advances, and aggravate, as far as they can, all their privations and troubles. But be of good courage; for greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. The Lord Jehovah is the friend of the good. In his favour you will find protection and comfort under all the frowns and the violence of evil men; and he will make all the opposition, and all the injuries which you can now experience, instrumental in preparing you for your return to your own country and kindred, and to your Father's house. What are the enchantments of earth to the charms of paradise? What is the mirth of fools to the songs of Zion? Or what are the sufferings of this present time to the pleasures which flow at the right hand of God? Trust in him who is the stranger's shield, cast not away the pilgrim's staff, and pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

2. It intimates, that by the death of our friends we are strikingly reminded, that this earth is the house of our pilgrimage.

The world hath many allurements, with which it tries to captivate our hearts, and we often yield too far to their influence. Our ardour in duty declines, our intercourse with spiritual objects languishes, and our abhorrence of the follies of surrounding scenes becomes less potent. We listen with a favourable ear to the details which its votaries give of their successes

and their triumphs, a dissatisfaction is felt with the allotments of Providence, in reference to ourselves and others, plans are formed, the execution of which would detach us from the great objects which we are pledged to pursue, and which we are tempted to regard as merely splendid visions, and we are in danger of being ranked with those who mind earthly things. In those circumstances some sharp affliction is necessary to disentangle our hearts from such snares, to shew us the vanity of what allured us so powerfully, the insufficiency of that for our happiness, for which our hearts were prompting us to struggle, and that other pursuits are much more necessary to creatures so near to eternity; and nothing does this so effectually as the death of the most beloved of our connexions. This takes from earth its principal attraction, reminds us that the time of our departure is at hand, and furnishes another inducement to seek the things which are above. To the bleeding heart the gayeties of the world may present their solicitations, but the mourner will not lift his eyes to look on them, or, if he does, it will be with such a glance as will shew at once that he has no heart for them. Such objects may banish a lighter sorrow, but to the broken heart they will be like the richest dews to the withered flower, or like the brightest sunshine to the spot which has been swept by the hurricane. The honours and wealth of the world appear to such a man not such objects of desire as they once did, by the departure of those with whom it would have been his delight to share them, into whose lap he would have poured all his wealth, on whose head he would have placed all

his distinctions. Nay, the advantages and comforts of his lot, which were enjoyed with a satisfaction at once innocent and delightful, in the society of one whose taste could arrange them to the best advantage, whose mind, rich in beautiful reflections, and whose heart, influenced by every grateful and kindly feeling, shed over them charms ever new, appear to him but sad remembrancers to aggravate his grief.

How gloomy, does he say, is this dwelling to me, which is not now enlivened by the smile and the voice of love! How dreary are the scenes once so delightful, since I must tread them pensive and solitary, without her whom their prospects enchanted, their fragrance gratified, and their melody charmed! What to me is the most agreeable society, when I am saying to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister, and when every moment this voice may reach me, "Behold the feet of them which have buried thy wife are at the door, and shall carry thee out." The charms of beauty are vain, for that countenance is changed which was decked with its freshest bloom. Wealth can do nothing to secure what the heart is most solicitous to retain, and to ward off what it is most eager to avert; for all that it could procure to save a life so dear was obtained, but in vain. The pride of life is but a passing show, the funeral is its last glimmer; and the joys of the happy are as a dream, for the purest and the sweetest which earth can furnish terminate in tears, in solitude, and in darkness.

3. It intimates that it is the duty of good men to profess that this is their condition. Abraham made

this declaration to the children of Heth; and of the patriarchs it is said that they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Think it not enough that you make this profession in your devout addresses to God, as David did, saying, "We are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding;"* but be not ashamed to make it before men. It is your duty to make on every proper occasion an explicit avowal that your inheritance is in heaven, and that in no earthly object can you find a portion for the heart, and to be ready to give to every one that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. Especially let your conduct evince that you are looking not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at those things which are not seen, and which are eternal. Remember that humility and consistency are the characteristics of the Christian profession, and that it is disgraced by every thing which has the appearance of parade or hesitation. This confession will be a monitor to yourselves, while it benefits others, and it will give you the purest and the sweetest delight to rescue even one soul from the fascinations of the world, and to form it to the love of things heavenly and divine.

Say not that this confession will only excite the ridicule or the abuse of the world; for if your conduct evinces its sincerity, the most dissipated will respect it; and who is he that will harm you, if you are followers of that which is good? It is true indeed,

* 1 Chronicles xxix. 15.

that when a man declaims on the deceitfulness of riches, while he is eager to amass, but reluctant to dispense them at the most urgent call of piety or mercy; or when invectives against fashionable amusements proceed from one who indulges in the grossest pleasures of sense, or in habitual slander; or when a person is heard cursing the wickedness and cruelty of oppression, who is the tyrant of his family, and the troubler of his neighbourhood, common sense sets them down as the vilest hypocrites; but when you can appeal to your conduct as a confirmation of your testimony, none will controvert it. Remember that this was a part of your Lord's good confession before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world;"* that Paul describes this as the avowed character of the primitive Christians, in which they were a pattern for all that bear the name of Jesus in all succeeding ages, "Our conversation is in heaven;" and that this is the title borne and gloried in by those who sing the new song before the throne, "the redeemed from the earth."

II. Let us now consider the lessons suggested by Abraham's request of a burying-place for his wife.

1. It shews how melancholy is the change which death produces on the human body. Sarah was distinguished for beauty of form and complexion. When Abraham went down into Egypt, he said, "Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife;

* John xviii. 36.

and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive;"* and twice was she taken from him to gratify the passion of princes, and restored to him uninjured, through the interposition of Providence. She was advanced in years before she died, but even then beauty, though less dazzling, is often more sweetly interesting. When age has whitened the locks, wasted the bloom of the cheek, and dimmed the lustre of the eye, it renders the form more sacred and venerable to the heart. But long and fondly as Abraham had doted on Sarah, he now wishes her buried out of his sight.

It is a painful effort to commit the bodies of those we love to the dust, but the rapid progress of corruption convinces the most reluctant of its necessity. The face on which admiration gazed has been contemplated with fear, and the hand which affection grasped has made by its stiffness and coldness the heart shudder in touching it. You have seen the form wasted by sickness, and the visage marred by sorrow, but still life hath an expression which renders the traces of disease and grief less hideous, but there is nought to mitigate the ghastliness of death.

O ye who now pride yourselves on loveliness of figure, your state shall soon be such, that your friends will be glad to hide you in the darkness of the grave! A noisome savour shall issue from lips, whose breath was like fragrant ointment, the cheeks where beauty shone corruption shall disfigure, and the whole frame so wonderfully made shall become a mass of putridity too hideous and loathsome to be approached. Even

* Genesis xii. 11, 12.

where death comes in its mildest form, and where the features retain longest a placid expression, this must still and quickly be the result. Amidst the intoxication of vanity and the rapture of admiration, this truth, however obvious, is forgotten; but it will be presented in a form which shall shock as well as convince, and perhaps ere any previous decay of nature has prepared you for it. Let not the heart dote on corporeal attractions, but let those graces be cultivated which age cannot enfeeble, nor death destroy, which blossom in age, and in death are perfected.

2. It intimates, that to departed friends the heart still cleaves. Abraham calls the corse "my dead." Death had dissolved the union betwixt Sarah and him, yet still he loved to think of her as his. Mine in life, mine in death, mine in the grave, and mine in heaven, are claims which the heart loves to make. The grave hides departed friends from the eyes of our body, but it cannot hide them from those of our imagination and our faith. We feel a peculiar interest in the grave of a departed friend. It is a spot which affection consecrates, a dwelling to which the heart goes down. In vain do other scenes attempt to engross the heart, we can think of nought but of the dead, and precious in our sight is their dust. We feel not only that the spirit, pure, bright, and happy in heaven, is that whose kind affections once rested, and do rest upon us still, but that the body, mouldering in the dust, is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. An attachment thus existing after death is one of the forms in which the soul of man defies its power, and amidst all the connexions it has formed, it glories in

regarding its relation to the dead as unbroken. In these claims there is neither presumption nor folly, and our Saviour sanctions them when he says, " Thy dead men shall live."

Some may ridicule these impressions as the frenzy of sorrow, and insist that beyond the gates of the grave it is idle to follow the departed. We envy not either their philosophic speculation, or composure, in an hour like this. The apathy they would inculcate would degrade men beneath the level of the brutes, preclude an exercise of feeling truly salutary, and keep from the dying the consolation of thinking that they shall live in the memory of their friends, and occupy their wonted place in their hearts.

Let us follow the dictates of nature, and the suggestions of hope, and rejoice that those whom we call our dead God calls his. He said, I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, long after they had returned to dust. And let it always be remembered, that while we maintain our connexion with their dust, we must do it with their spirits in heaven, by the careful imitation of their example, and by attempting those exercises in which they are for ever engaged round the throne of the Highest.

3. It shews us that grief for the loss of friends must not be so indulged as to unfit us for the charge of their funeral, and that this ought to be conducted in a manner becoming their station and our own. Abraham stood up from before his dead, and said, " Give me a burying-place." When sorrow in such a situation incapacitates us for our proper duties, it is equally unworthy of the fortitude of men and of the hopes of

Christians. Fortitude, if called up to exercise, will strengthen the failing heart, and the hope of immortality will brighten the gloom that covers the path which leads to the grave. After the first burst of feeling has subsided, we ought to reflect on the duties which are required of us by the sad event, and, trusting in that strength which is made perfect in the weakness of humanity, pledge ourselves to perform them. Such exertions of duty are the best tribute to the worth of the dead, and the best means of consolation to the living.

The funeral of dead relatives is among the first cares which press on the survivor, and where any wish has been expressed by them respecting it, it should be fulfilled, if not forbidden by a voice more sacred. In some circles it has been deemed fashionable to commit the burial of the nearest connexions to others, and the body is left the moment the breath departs, to return to it no more. Men may ascribe this practice to extreme sensibility, but it is the arrangement of a selfish gayety which shrinks from the scene of mortality, and which hates every monitor that would disturb its mad career. Who, think you, is the man, who, in these circumstances, acts a part the most becoming? It is not he who terrifies surrounding friends by the wild gestures and cries of sorrow; neither is it he who hurries to scenes where, amidst gayety or bustle, the dead are forgotten; but it is he who, having dropt on the dead his parting tear, and raised by their side a prayer that he may be enabled to imitate their excellences, goes forth to direct their funeral, and sees them deposited in their long home.

Abraham wished a burying-place of his own. It is

a natural wish of every heart to have a place where its ashes may mingle with the ashes of those with whom it was connected by the closest ties of love. The idea of the corpse of a wife or a child being deposited in a grave to which ours are not likely to have access is painful. It is soothing to the heart of a dying man to think that he shall sleep by the side of those whose memory he hath cherished with unceasing veneration, and that by his side those he most values on earth shall soon repose. Death thus unites their dust in the grave and their spirits in heaven.

When the customs of the place where we live as to funerals are decent, we ought to comply with them. It is a vanity and pride inconsistent with the humility which death should produce, to aim at exciting attention on such occasions by the display of singularity in any form. It is when singularity is demanded by prudence, or moral principle, that a good man feels impelled to shew it. Expensive decoration, sumptuous entertainments, or idle parade, are most unbecoming such a solemnity. With the garb of sorrow we should mingle its feelings and its language, and by the humiliation which becomes us as mortal, and the hope which becomes us as immortal creatures, approve ourselves to our consciences and to our God.

4. It intimates, that in the burial of our friends we ought to express our confidence in the promises of God, and do what we can to cherish that confidence in others. Abraham buried Sarah in the land of Canaan, and ordered that his own body should be deposited there, to shew his persuasion that this land should be given to his seed, and to confirm the faith

of it. But what opportunity have we at such seasons of following his example? Let us do it in pious conversation. When the heart is burdened with sorrow it is not fit for saying much, but let it express the hope of eternal life in that simple, but earnest testimony which is dictated by gratitude for its consoling influence, and which has a power over the hearts of those that hear it, which is not felt in the most ingenious reasonings, or the most vehement declamation. What the heart dictates the heart will feel.

It is to be regretted that in the house of mourning, and at funerals, carnality of spirit often prompts to discourse most unsuitable; but this holy conversation will put such persons to silence, and either convince them of their folly, or make them retire from a scene where there is no relish for their vain talking.

There have been too many instances in which the watching of corpses has been made the scene of youthful merriment and wanton folly. In the chamber where the voice of lamentation might have been expected, the laughter that is mad has been heard, and a soul gone to judgment, and a body attired for the grave, have not rendered the giddy serious, nor the foolish wise. It is a great improvement in manners, that in general the bodies of the dead are reserved till the graves are ready for them amidst solemn silence, the meditations of sober reflection, and the sighs and tears of grief not outraged by folly. How frightful was the contrast betwixt the flush of wantonness and the paleness of death; betwixt the tale of folly, or the voice of them that make merry, and the closed lips and utter silence of the victims of mortality! It has been one of Satan's

aims to make seasons, most adapted to render the mind sober and serious, not only useless but pernicious. One of his devices for this purpose has been to excite to wanton gayety, or intemperate indulgence, and the very obstruction placed in their way has made corruptions more impetuous. To counteract these requires all the vigilance and authority of moral control in persons whose rank or wisdom give them influence. We should express our hope of immortality in the psalms which are sung, and in the passages of holy writ which are read in such situations. Even in the most thoughtless families religious worship is performed on such occasions, but it cannot yield such comfort to the heart and conscience in these cases as it does where it has been the morning and evening employment. Acquaintance with the Scriptures will guide to those portions which are best adapted to our circumstances, and which will be a word in season to the weary soul. The inscriptions which are placed on their grave-stones should exhibit not only the virtues of the dead, but the hopes of the living. While the proud man has employed the grave-stone as the altar for incense to his vanity, genius as the record of its powers, and the man of wit as the memorial of his humour, the religious ought to consecrate it as the tablet of their hopes. Texts of Scripture inscribed on it have sometimes struck the curious visitant of the church-yard, and more frequently still have they comforted the mourner. "In an immense church-yard," says a traveller, "which I visited in Paris, there is not the least recognition on any grave-stone of Him who is the resurrection and the life, except on that of a Protestant minister, and on that of two Englishmen

who had been buried there. How delightful, amidst inscriptions which bear strong marks of infidelity or superstition, to see the moral grandeur of Britain discernible, to see the ashes of her sons reposing in a foreign land, under monuments which indicate the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Among the trophies of mortality, the word of God has been the ministration of life. Nay, our hope of eternal life should be expressed in our whole demeanour, in that superiority to sordid views and quarrels, by which the house of mourning has been sometimes disgraced, in the general elevation of our minds, in our ardour in holy exercises, and in our unwearied and disinterested efforts to do good.

CONCLUSION.

Let Christians impress their minds with those texts of Scripture which enjoin them to consider themselves as strangers on the earth. Mark how this was not only the impression of the patriarchs in their wanderings, but of David and Solomon in their palaces, and of the primitive Christians who were not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world.

Let Sion's pilgrims beware of casting stumbling-blocks, or strewing thorns in each other's way, but let them support the weak, comfort the feeble-minded, and be patient to all men; and while others are not ashamed to declare that to the world they look for their happiness, let your whole course point to heaven. Let not the boldness be all on the side of those who ought to blush for themselves; or the timidity and reserve be all on yours, who should speak the truth in love. Be thankful for every admonition, however

painful, that this is not your rest. Would a man asleep in a scene of danger complain of the noise, or even of the blow which awakened him to make a timely escape? Let your ears be closed to every sound which would lull you to sleep in a scene so perilous.

Since we shall soon have to express the wish of Abraham with regard to those dearest to us, let us beware of that extravagance of affection which idolizes its object. Far be it from me to recommend that coldness of heart, and that sullenness of manner, which some deem the characteristic of superior wisdom and piety. The heart which is without natural affection never had the love of God shed abroad in it; but what I condemn is the looking for that happiness in the best of creatures, which is only to be found in the Creator, declining any service which God requires for our gratification in their society, and imagining, when they are taken from us, that our happiness is ruined. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."*

Let your sorrows in the hour of separation be those of Christians. Never think of separation from your friends without anticipating your reunion, and when you brood on what is gone, reflect on what remains. Ye who are in old age consider what gratitude you owe to God for having spared so long to you the wife

* 1 Cor. vii. 29.

of your youth, and for how short a time you are parted. But as to those who have lost the partners of their hearts, at a period when every feeling is most acute, and when their endearing qualities were in their brightest lustre, let them consider that at their season of life religious comfort is felt with the liveliest interest, and that the severity of the trial gives them the opportunity of a nobler display of pious submission. Let not the widow whose husband's death hath left her to struggle with difficulties alone, sink in despondence. It is for you that the Scripture spreads out its precious promises; the presence of God shall cheer your lonely dwelling, his care shall extend to all your interests, your fatherless children shall find him the guide of their youth, and the prospect which appears so dark before you, shall be brightened by that Sun which hath healing in its wings. I am God all-sufficient is the character in which the Lord reveals himself to the desolate, and in which he invites you to a trust, which will yield you quietness and assurance for ever.

Let every thought of a friend's burial-place be connected with a visit by faith to the place where the Lord lay. This will sanctify your meditation. Holy friends laid him in the grave, and delighted to honour his remains; and the pious often repair to that spot in their contemplations, and listen with interest to its admonitions and hopes. And consider, that what the text calls you to do to others, others will soon have to do for you. "I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabit-

ants of the world."* May these sad prospects be cheered by such hopes as these, "I shall enter into peace, and mingle with the redeemed from the earth. As for me I shall behold thy face in righteousness, and when I awake, I shall be satisfied with thy likeness." With such prospects as to the soul, you may leave without anxiety your bodies to the care of surviving friends. Some good men have given directions respecting their funeral; and it is a striking fact, that, wherever this has been done, it has been enjoined to be performed with all possible privacy. The vain show of the world is an object of disgust to the dying, even to those of them who are still unrenewed; and if it is so to them, it must be much more so to those in whose taste, desires, and habits, heaven is begun. Study the extensive import of that injunction of Christ, "Be ye also ready," and let conformity to it be the object of every effort and of every moment.

There are some whose portion is in this present life, but your false ideas of it cannot protract your stay in it, and shall only aggravate the misery which its disappointments must produce. Conviction, when too late, yields only misery and shame. The death of your friends admonishes you that here there is no abiding,—but how soon is the lesson forgotten! The seriousness produced by such an event is but momentary, and you know not what it is to sorrow after a godly sort. If you think of God in such a scene, it is to murmur against his dispensations, and how seldom does the tear of penitence mingle with that of nature! Death shall soon make your body loathsome;

* Isaiah xxxvii. 10, 11.

but think on the state of the soul when it appears before God laden with iniquity, and overwhelmed with shame and horror. If your friends are pious, your sorrow at their death shall be embittered by reflection on the uneasiness which you gave them, and if they are wicked, you feel that you shall not meet again to be happy. In hell not a voice speaks in kindness, not an eye drops in pity, and so far from anticipating the appearance of surviving friends in that abode, the wicked would solicit, as the rich man in the parable did, that they might not come to that place of torment,—a request which was dictated, not by benevolence but selfishness. He had corrupted the principles of his brethren by his profligate sophistry, and led them into vice by the example of his sensuality, and he dreaded their curses as the author of their ruin. Flatter not yourselves with the vain conceit that your anguish will be soothed there by the agreeable qualities of your friends, or their sympathy with you; for every wicked man there is a curse to others and a tormentor to himself. Listen then to the warnings of religion, and seek in it the guide of life, the consolation of death, and the blessedness of eternity. I call you to that faith in the Saviour, that repentance unto life, that holy temper and conduct which will make your life a blessing to your friends and a pleasing sacrifice to your God, and your removal into eternity at whatever time, and in whatever form it may take place, a translation to perfect felicity. May God thus prepare you for sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of our Father, by a life of faith and goodness, and in due time receive you to glory. Amen.

DISCOURSE XX.

ON THE DEATH OF CHILDREN.

JEREMIAH XXXI. 15—17. *Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border.*

THESE words exhibit a most affecting picture of the distress of mothers in Israel, because their children had been carried away as captives to Babylon, and set before us the consoling hope by which Jehovah alleviated their sorrows. Though he was justly displeased with them on account of their sins, and though he had punished them less than their iniquities deserved, yet in wrath he remembers mercy, and assures them that the children, whose bondage in a distant land they bewailed so bitterly, should return again to Palestine, notwithstanding the difficulties which seemed to render this impracticable, arising from their own feeble and dispirited condition, and from the power and rigour of their oppressors.

This passage is accommodated by the evangelist

Matthew, to represent the sorrow of the mothers whose infants were sacrificed to the jealous fears of Herod; and it may be applied in all ages to point out the duty and the consolations of mourning parents. In large societies the death of children is a calamity which often occurs, and in hearing a discourse on this subject, many listen to advices and consolations the need of which they have either felt or may feel.

In the following discourse we shall direct your attention to the case of sorrow here described, to the duty to which the text calls bereaved parents, and to the reasons which are here assigned to moderate their grief.

I. Let us consider the case of sorrow which is here described. A parent weeps for departed children. The God of nature hath attached the hearts of parents to children by the strongest ties. Without such a powerful attachment, the privations, toils, and cares which their nurture requires would never be submitted to; but love renders all these easy and pleasant.

Parents form many pleasing hopes of the distinction and success which their children will attain in life. They flatter themselves, that in their old age and infirmities, they will find in their children's kindness and care a supply to their wants, a solace to their sorrows, and a refuge from their fears, and that when they die, they will fall asleep in their arms, live in their remembrance, and be honoured in their virtues. This was suggested to Jacob as the sweetest encouragement which could be addressed to him, by that God who knows our frame, that his darling son

should put his hand upon his eyes. But death scatters all these hopes, and leaves nothing to the eye but a helpless age, a lonely death, and quick oblivion. Nature feels the cords of love violently broken in pieces, and this is the purpose which it stimulates the heart to form,—" I will go down to the grave to my son mourning."

Other losses may be supplied. The wealth that is lost by an unfortunate turn in business may be recovered by a more successful adventure, reputation tainted by one act of folly may be regained by caution and good conduct, the desertion of a friend may be supplied by another more worthy of the name, but parents feel that none can be to them what their children were.

There is a circumstance mentioned in this description of a parent's sorrow which requires explanation. " They refuse to be comforted, because they are not." It accords with the obscurity of the ancient dispensation; many anxieties were then felt about the resurrection of the dead, and to those who judged by outward appearance it seemed a thing incredible; nay, even under the bright light of the Gospel, painful fears torture the heart respecting departed children. Nature suggests, that while those who have served God long and faithfully may expect a resurrection, they can have no claim to it who perished like a plant which hath scarcely raised its head above the ground, and in whom neither reason nor piety were permitted to blossom. That such creatures have become as if they had never been, is the most probable conjecture which nature can form respecting them, and it is this

which aggravates parental sorrow, that to them, to felicity, and to existence, they seem lost for ever.

In some cases this calamity is aggravated by the most painful apprehensions of the eternal misery of departed children; and let it not be said that these are only the result of a malignant fanaticism, operating on the weak and the ignorant, for they have harassed many whose vigour of mind and whose benevolence of heart were undoubted. They are produced at this season by the strong impression which they feel of the malignity of that original corruption which has made infants liable to sufferings and death, by their indistinct views, in the hour of sorrow, of the merits and grace of the second Adam, which are more potent to save than the guilt of the first Adam was to destroy, and by their not crediting and improving as they ought the compassion which Christ has shewn to little children.

II. Let us now, in the second place, attend to the duty to which bereaved parents are here called. "Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears." It is obvious that this cannot be understood as prohibiting every feeling and expression of sorrow. A disregard of affliction, whether it appears in the form of sullenness or levity, and whether it arises from the pride of philosophy, the power of youthful gayety, or the engagements of worldly business, is both unnatural and unamiable. If a calamity is not felt, it will not be improved. The heart that is not melted by an affliction, which tears from men what is most dear to nature, will not probably be softened by

the tenderest mercies. This apathy, which some recommend as the most useful attainment in practical wisdom, would deprive piety of all its fervour, resignation of all its value, sympathy of all its offices, and comfort of all its sweetness.

The command in the text prohibits only excessive sorrow, and it is fit, for the honour of God as well as for our good, that this should be forbidden. In such sorrow, thoughts most unworthy of God are cherished, his claims on our gratitude are disregarded, a disrelish is felt for every remaining enjoyment, the duties of our station are a burden, the health of the body sinks under the influence of solitude, fasting, and watchfulness, and the vigour of the mind is broken by dark forebodings and wasting fretfulness. Such sorrow has a most unhappy influence on the men of the world, in prompting them to despise the consolations of religion, and in filling them with prejudice against its spirit. It will lead them to expose the glaring inconsistency between your professions and your conduct; nor will they admit any apology which might be offered from the greater keenness of your feelings, or the superior excellence of your children, but will treat it as the despicable pretext of partiality and folly. This is the language in which they will speak of you; they will say that you loudly professed that Christ was your all, and that in him you could be happy in the utter desolation of all created good, and yet you now complain when one hope of your house is taken away, as if neither earth nor heaven could repair the bereavement.

Instead of indulging such a sorrow, cherish a deep sense of Jehovah's goodness, and acknowledge his jus-

tice in the evil that has come upon you. Confess before him your folly in doting with such excessive fondness on the children whom God had given you, and implore wisdom and grace to enable you in future to regulate your attachments in a manner more conducive to his glory, and less dangerous to your own peace. To attain this holy submission, look away from the scene which reminds you of your child's agonies, from the coffin in which you have laid it, from the grave where the worm is consuming the form which you so fondly cherished, and turn your eyes to the cross of Christ, and there behold the only begotten Son of God bleeding in unpitied agony, and dying an accursed death for the expiation of our sins. And why is he fixed there, and why does he thus suffer? It is because his Father spares him not, but delivers him up for us all. At such a contemplation every murmur will be put to silence; you will adore the depth of Jehovah's love, and resignation will make you exclaim in the words of a man of God, after the calamities which stript him of all his goods, and bereft him of every child,—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."*

If heathenism could lead parents to sacrifice their first-born for their transgression, and the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul, religious principle must be very feeble in you, if it cannot influence you to resign without a murmur your children to the Father of mercies, when he demands them, when he calls them away to make them happy, and when he pro-

* Job i. 21.

mises to restore them to you with every possible advantage.

III. I proceed now, in the third place, to illustrate the arguments which are here suggested to moderate parental sorrow.

1. It is the command of God that they should not sorrow immoderately. It is like the voice which he addressed to the mourning widow at Nain, when he had compassion on her, and said to her, "Weep not." He ought to be obeyed in whatever he requires, and he never demands aught from us that is unreasonable in itself, or inconsistent with our true interest. He bids you moderate your sorrow, because its violence manifests an unbelief which dishonours his kind intentions, and questions his all-sufficiency, and because it injures the health both of the body and of the mind. You are offended with a child who, in spite of the most soothing entreaties of a parent, continues to weep, but your own conduct in refusing to be comforted is much more to be condemned. That child hath not reason to check the violence of its passions, or to point out to it the claim which a parent's voice hath to its obedience; but you know that you cannot disobey Him without rebellion against the mildest authority, and without madly disregarding all that peace and comfort which pious acquiescence in the Divine will never fails to produce.

The voice and tears of sorrow are sometimes checked by a ridicule which fills the mourner with shame; at other times by rebukes or threats which strike him with terror; but the command in the text is the

language of authority, which is mingled in all its precepts and in all its acts with wisdom and with love. So soft are the tones in which it speaks, that while the heart feels it must be obeyed, the renunciation of its own will is a pleasing sacrifice. It would much rather yield at once what God requires, than retain the sweetest comfort, if it were possible, with his displeasure, and in opposition to his demand. Now, though God had said no more than this, that it was his will you should thus be calm, it would be your duty to submit, but the obligation is heightened by the precious promises which he subjoins.

2. Consider the promises which he makes with regard to yourselves,—"There is hope in thine end: and thy work shall be rewarded." Think not as if Jehovah had said, that because thy children are gone thy latter end shall be dreary and comfortless. Have I no hand but theirs to minister to thy failing flesh, and no voice but theirs to comfort thy fainting heart? I can raise up friends under whose sympathy thy course shall terminate with comfort; and by the influence of my Spirit, I can give thee in that hour, when every agency but my own is unavailing, everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace. Figure not then to yourselves your last end as the pencil of despair would delineate it, but leave it to be drawn by a lively and cheerful hope. Think not that hope hath forsaken you never to return; and say not, "Mine eye shall no more see good," for there is a world before you where rest and joy await you, and where the affections of the heart shall be gratified to the full in the communion of the blessed.

The spirit of the world prompts men to make a variety of provisions for their end, though they all refer to the present scene, and not to the eternity on which they must enter at death. A superb monument, a bright renown, or a splendid establishment for their family, are the great objects of their cares and exertions; but religion prepares what is infinitely more important and desirable, even hope which maketh not ashamed, and which enters within the veil.

But Jehovah intimates also that their work should be rewarded. Imagine not that your pains have been thrown away; for you shall find that your children have been preparing for glory under your culture, and that while you were teaching them the piety which would induce them to walk in the fear of God, and honour the memory of the Redeemer, you were forming them for the worship of the celestial temple, and for the high praises of the Lamb.

You had flattered yourselves that your children should live to requite your care,—that in the profession for which you had educated them, or the business in which you had fixed them,—by the principles you had instilled into them,—the habits of exertion to which you had formed them, and the sacrifices which you had made to ensure their success, they should prosper and flourish, and be able to do more than repay you,—but though they cannot, your God will, and the more bountifully you have sown, the more plentifully shall you reap. If, in what you did for them, you were actuated not by vain and sordid motives, but by principles which are worthy of a Christian parent, God will accept a parent's duty as

homage to himself. Your children might have lived and requited you evil for good; the vine which you cultivated with so much care might have brought forth wild grapes instead of the fruit which you had anticipated; but the rewards which God hath promised, and which the obedience of faith expects, shall assuredly be granted in all their extent.

Nay, the expression intimates, that the struggle you now maintain to bring your strong passions and feelings into submission to the Divine will, shall be rewarded. He knows every effort this self-denial costs you, and it is not merely for doing, but for bearing his will, that he hath prepared a gracious recompense on high. Though the patience is the fruit of his own spirit,—though the fortitude is the result of the power of Christ, he will reward it; and though the struggle is known to no heart but your own, it shall crown you with honour. For such struggles the world hath no reward; nay, some of her children will censure you for the state of mind which renders them necessary,—and others will blame you for your success in them as an indication of a heart in which the most amiable feelings of humanity are easily repressed, and never operated strongly; but God will judge you in truth and mercy, and you shall find that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed.

3. He comforts you by the hope of your children's resurrection. The grave is indeed the land of the enemy,—to it Death conveys his captives, and there exercises his power over them in a manner at which nature shudders. Not only is the bloom of beauty

and the smile of affection banished from the countenance, but there corruption riots. The little hands which you taught them to lift up in God's name are now bound in the fetters of death; and the lips from which you delighted to hear his praise are sealed in constant silence. The coffin is the prison which it must now occupy, the worm is the only companion of the putrefying carcass, and darkness and silence cover its drear abode.

And shall the prey be taken from the Mighty,—shall the lawful captive be delivered? We know they shall, for Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He hath come from the land of the enemy,—he was once dead, and is now alive for evermore,—he hath all necessary power for this purpose, and a compassionate desire to employ it. Some who possess powers, by the exercise of which others may be benefited, are sometimes restrained from this by caprice, or by the influence of others, but this is the determination of the Lord Jesus, and who can turn him? "O grave, I will be thy destruction!" And this is the will of him that sent him, that of all whom he hath given him he should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.* His victory must be completed in the final destruction of the last enemy, and in the eternal life of all who died in the Lord.

To encourage your faith, behold the manifestations which he hath already given of his power. Think not that the enemy hath a firmer hold of thy babe than of others; or that Jesus will be unwilling to ex-

* John vi. 39.

ert his power for the resurrection of infants. Behold Elijah stretching himself three times on the child of the widow of Sarepta, and praying to the Lord in his behalf, and the Lord heard his voice, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him to his mother, and said, See, thy son liveth. Behold Elisha raising the son of the Shunamite; and the narrative of that scene beautifully shews the happy issue of the trial of faith. Gehazi, by his master's order, lays the prophet's staff on the face of the child, but there was neither voice nor hearing. Elisha engages in solemn prayer, and then puts his mouth on the child's mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and the flesh of the child waxed warm, and he at length opened his eyes, and the mother came in and fell at his feet in unutterable transport, and took up her son and went out.*

Behold Jesus entering the place where the daughter of Jairus was lying, a child of twelve years of age, in the sleep of death. The insulting mockery of the attendants did not check his gracious purpose to this child, but taking the parents with him, whom he would not leave a moment comfortless, he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, arise.† That hand was already cold,—friends were about to grasp it for the last time, but Jesus by his touch testified his kindness and imparted his quickening power. Soft was his voice! but death could not resist it. And can you, after all these proofs, doubt his power

* 1 Kings xviii. 2 Kings iv. † Mark v.

and grace? Your dead offspring shall live,—his hand is not shortened that it cannot save. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, for your dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out its dead.

4. He comforts you by the hope of that connexion and intercourse which shall again be established betwixt you and your children. They shall be brought again to their own border. Though the relations which exist in the present state are finally dissolved by death, yet among the blessed in heaven, peculiar interest will be felt in those with whom in the providence and grace of God they were intimately associated upon earth. Their review of God's dealings with them in the wilderness, must call up with it those who were joined with them in the enjoyment of the same blessings,—those with whom sweet counsel was taken, and those whom they received as pledges of Jehovah's love. To them their hearts will cleave with an attachment purified from all its present imperfections; and as the kind affections do not now impede the exercise of benevolence and friendship, they will not in the least degree restrain that complacency in all around them with which the just made perfect must behold each other.

Our Lord encourages this hope by delivering to his mother the young man at Nain, whom he had restored to life. It is his glory to restore to the arms of affection what death had torn from them, and to turn the wailings of bereavement into the transports of reunion. Your dead children have no more a part in aught that is done under the sun, but an inheritance is reserved for them in heaven, to which they shall

one day rise, and which they shall possess along with you. This hope will surely reconcile you to their removal from you at present. You cheerfully part with them when they go to a distance from you to prosecute their education; the idea of their improvement compensates all the uneasy feelings of absence; and this will surely alleviate the regrets of your present separation, that you shall soon meet them superior in every grace to a degree which you cannot now conceive. They shall have a place among the ransomed of the Lord who shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.—There they shall appear, not in the feeble capacity and limited conceptions of childhood, but perfect men in Christ, and filled with all the fulness of God.

CONCLUSION.

Let me call on those who are sorrowing for the loss of children to apply to their hearts these words of consolation. Implore the influence of the Comforter to impress them on your hearts in their power and sweetness. He can give brightness to that which you now think but an obscure glimmering, and fix on immortality and its scenes those thoughts and affections which now cleave so strongly to the dust.

Beware of that impious despondence which rejects the consolations of religion as insufficient. You can assign no proper excuse for the extravagance of your sorrow. You say, that if your children had been less amiable, you would have resigned them more readily; but it was Jehovah who made them thus engaging, and in rendering them thus lovely he did

not impair or set aside his right to demand them from you.

You say, why am I singled out from others to be written childless in the earth? but you have no reason to complain that God has tried you more than others, when he has given you promises of peculiar blessings, and when it is his intention to make you to others an example of suffering affliction with patience and fortitude. There never was one but Jesus who could say with truth that there never was sorrow like to his sorrow.

Perhaps some of you are murmuring that this trial came upon you unexpectedly, and that on this account it has utterly overwhelmed you; but it was your sin to be thus secure, and it will be wise to learn from this sad vicissitude never to be high-minded, but to fear.

Let those whose children are spared with them learn to sympathize with mourning parents. Let the pleasure which you feel in the endearing society of your children, draw out your souls to those who once were happy in their dwellings as you are. What would they give could their infants smile on them, or hang upon their necks, or climb upon their knees, as yours now do. O let not the uninterrupted continuance of your domestic happiness render you inattentive to the claims, or regardless of the woes of others! From you they have a right to expect a strong interest in their calamity, and a patient attention to all those statements of the engaging qualities of the departed, by which the heart is soothed and gratified in the hour of sorrow. Remember that your

day of bereavement is coming, and beware of that excessive attachment to your children which will make it the season of your wretchedness. The more you fix your happiness on the creature the less able will you be to bear its removal. Consider that there are objects far more worthy of the throne of your hearts than the most amiable on earth can be, and that he that loveth wife or children, relatives or possessions, more than Christ, is not worthy of him.

Let parents, who are pained by the symptoms of the approaching dissolution of their children, bless God for the comfort which he hath prepared for that hour of trial. You see their strength and beauty consuming away like that of the withering plant, whose decline may be traced in the changing hue and the fall of its leaves, which drop silently, and in succession, till all are gone, and the root itself dies in the ground. But while you forebode their death, anticipate also their consolations. That plant shall again bud and send forth boughs, the fairest blossoms of moral beauty shall adorn it, and it shall bear the fruits of righteousness in perfection.

How beautiful and affecting is the following language used in prayer to God by a wise and good man, respecting his dead children!*—"I would offer my most hearty and solemn thanksgivings for thy mercies shewn to my dear children. Four of them thou wast pleased to call out of this dangerous and sinful world

* The person referred to is the late William Hey, Esq. surgeon, Leeds, a man of considerable celebrity in his profession, eminent in the graces of the Christian character, and rich in good works.

during the state of infancy. I surrendered them to thee in thy holy ordinance of baptism, and committed them to thy disposal. Thou didst remove them ere the pollutions of this world had led their corrupt hearts astray, and I humbly hope thou didst receive them to thy glory. Concerning other four whom thou hast called hence in adult age, thou hast graciously given me the most solid hopes. Though by nature children of wrath even as others, thou wast pleased to awaken them to a sense of the odious nature of sin, and to grant them true repentance. They were early taught by thy grace to flee for refuge to the Friend of sinners, and thou didst prolong their lives till they had given clear proofs of a sound conversion. Though prepared, as I hope, to glorify thee on earth, thou didst dispense with their services, and didst remove them hence in the beginning of their usefulness. But thy grace was with them. In their sickness, and at the approach of death, they were enabled to rejoice in thy salvation. The last of them I am this day to commit to the silent grave, but in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection to eternal life. What shall I render to thee for all thy mercies! O that my future life might more abundantly shew forth thy praise!"

Finally. Let us all remember that it is only to certain characters that the doctrine of the resurrection can yield consolation. The immoral, the irreligious, and the careless parent can have no hope that either he, or those who have perished through his neglect, shall have any share in the resurrection to eternal life. Your children, who have died without the know-

ledge of Jesus, shall be brought to your side, but you shall hear from their lips nought but the upbraidings and the curses which they think due to those who led them to ruin. It will then be your wish that you and they had never been born, for to them you shall be unable to administer any consolation, and none shall be imparted to your own hearts. You think that language vain: "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked;"* but you shall then find it true in all its dark and tremendous import. Hell is the land of the enemy, and from it there is no return. Horrible shall be your weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see the righteous and their seed in the kingdom of God, while you are dwelling with everlasting burnings. As you value your own happiness and that of those who are dear to you, I beseech you to take the Lord for your God, and the God of your seed. In committing your souls to the Redeemer's mercy, you place your families under his shadow. Listen to this expression of his heart-melting wish,—"Oh that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"† I say to you as Paul and Silas did to the jailer at Philippi,—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house;"‡ and may God enable you to comply with this call as he did, and this day shall salvation come to your dwelling. Amen.

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* Isaiah xlviii. 22. † Deut. v. 29. ‡ Acts xviii. 31.

DISCOURSE XXI.

THE CONSOLATIONS OF THE NEW COVENANT UNDER DOMESTIC TRIALS.

2 Sam. xxiii. 5.—*Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.*

If the expressions of the dying are listened to with deep interest, the hymn before us has peculiar claims on our attention, as containing the last words of one who was eminent as a poet, a monarch, a prophet, and a saint. Its strains are in tenderness and sublimity, worthy of the sweet psalmist of Israel, and exhibit to us genius unaffected by the decay of nature, and shedding a lustre soft and pleasing over a scene of all others the most perilous and trying to man.

Solicitous for the happiness of the people whom he governed, he draws a picture of what a monarch should be, for the direction of all who should succeed him on the throne; and I have no doubt anticipated the appearance and blessings of his rule, who was to be at once his Son and his Lord, whose dominion should reach to the ends of the earth, whose sceptre should be a sceptre of righteousness, and to whose reign there should be no period.

David was soon to walk through the valley of the shadow of death,—that gloomy region he beheld stretched out before him, but he encourages himself in his grace, who is as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds, and who should spread over that dark scene not that dim light which should only make its horrors more overpowering, but that clear shining which directs the steps, and encourages to go forward.

The situation of his family was distressing. Some of them had been guilty of gross crimes,—death had taken away others,—and of his presence and counsels those who remained were soon to be deprived.—In the inexperience and presumption of youth some of them might not be aware of the loss they should sustain by his removal, while he saw it in a way which excited many painful anxieties and forebodings; but amid these feelings, he draws comfort from that covenant of peace and friendship which the eternal God had formed with him, and in which there are promises which place the children of the pious in circumstances most favourable to their best interests, and offer them the guardianship of their father's God. The silver cord of life was about to be loosed, and the ties which bound him to the world were about to be broken asunder, but this was his comfort, that he was united to God by a connexion which could not be dissolved, and which secured to him the everlasting enjoyment of his favour.

Happy is that family, whatever be its trials, whose head hath such a blessed hope as this; and it is my wish to excite you to secure for yourselves, and for

your children, that relation to God which shields from evils from which no other alliance can protect; which imparts blessings which no other alliance can yield, and which shall remain indissoluble when all the connexions of time have passed away. Alas! that this is the only alliance, respecting which no admiration is expressed by many, and no solicitude is felt.

In the following discourse, I shall call your attention to the excellences of the new covenant here specified, to the interest believers have in it, and to the consolation which it yields in domestic trials, and in the view of death.

I. Let us then consider the excellences of the new covenant which are here specified.

1. It is everlasting. From eternity the various parts of the plan of salvation were settled. Christ was set up as our surety, and engaged to his Father to fulfil all righteousness in behalf of guilty sinners; the persons who should be brought within the bond of the covenant were chosen, and eternal life was promised to them in him before the world began.—The foundations of the building of mercy were laid before the mountains were settled, or the hills were formed. In the contemplation of eternity past, our minds are soon bewildered and lost; but this is a thought whose grandeur enraptures even while it elevates and awes, that in these ages, so inaccessible to human penetration, our redemption was concerted, and that the Mediator's delights were with the sons of men.

This covenant is everlasting in its duration. Mercy shall be built up for ever; and when the universe shall perish in one general ruin, this structure shall remain uninjured. It rests on the rock of ages, and is protected by the arm of Omnipotence. It is a thought which damps the pride of wealth and glory, and which often saddens the heart amidst the delights of this earthly scene, that their termination is both certain and near. The gratifications of riches, the lustre of science, the pomp of power, and the endearments of friendship, shall perish in the grave, but to this covenant no period of dissolution can arrive, nor shall any vicissitude bring with it the forfeiture or the decay of any of its blessings. We can tell when the covenant of day and night was formed, and when it shall pass away, but this covenant is like Jehovah himself, from everlasting to everlasting. Short was the duration of the covenant of works. Perhaps it existed not a single day, for man being in honour, did not abide, and the consequences of the breach of it have been not only deplorable but permanent. These, however, have passed, and shall pass away as to those who seek for shelter under the better covenant, but "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on them that fear him, and his righteousness to children's children."*

2. It is ordered in all things. Superficial observers may not discern the admirable arrangement and harmony of the various parts of this covenant, like the peasant who imagines that the stars are scattered in

* Psalm ciii. 17.

wild confusion over the sky, while persons properly informed know that God has appointed to every planet its place and course; but the man, whose views of this covenant are most enlarged, perceives that it is adjusted with wonderful skill, and this impression will increase with the improved faculties and advancing knowledge of eternity.

How admirably is this covenant ordered for securing the glory of the Father! Arrangements are made in it for displaying his wisdom in its depth, his holiness in its beauty, and his grace in its riches. We behold justice the habitation of his throne, mercy the delight of his heart, and love the essence and character of deity. Attributes which created wisdom could never harmonize, and whose operations seemed utterly impossible as to the same objects, are destined to work together for the honour of God, and for the salvation of the sinner, and to find, in the union of both, their brightest triumph.

How admirably is it ordered for the Mediator's glory! Every qualification requisite for his work, as the apostle and High Priest of our profession, and rewards the most splendid after its accomplishments are provided in it. He was promised the tongue of the learned, and the sword of the conqueror, the treasures of wisdom, and the spirit of might. He was assured of many crowns, the happiness of his redeemed, and a name above every name.

How admirably, also, is it ordered for the glory of the Holy Spirit! It is provided in it, that millions raised from the ruins of the fall into temples of God shall honour him as the spirit of holiness,—that

human beings, filled by him with joy and peace in affliction and death, shall glorify him as a Comforter, —and that objects of mercy, enlightened with the knowledge of God's will, endowed with fortitude in danger, and led in safety to heaven, shall magnify him as the guide of the pilgrim, the strength of the feeble, the instructor of the simple, and the perfecter of the saints.

This covenant is ordered for promoting the humility of the saints. It is arranged in such a manner that every blessing appears the fruit of free grace, and our highest attainments are felt increasing our obligations to Him who worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. Of Him and to Him are all things. Just men made perfect are light in the Lord, but they glory not in their wisdom,—they are beautified with salvation, but they glory not in their comeliness,—they inherit all things, but they glory not in their riches,—they are raised above all the infirmities of mortality, but they glory not in their strength. They glory in the Lord alone, who is the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift comes down, on whom every pious hope rests, to whom every prayer of faith is directed, and to whom every sacrifice of gratitude is presented which is offered either on earth or in heaven.

How admirably is this covenant ordered for confounding the devil! It is provided in it, that the objects of mercy shall be raised to the possession of a lovelier paradise than Eden, and of a nobler crown than that which fell from our heads; that he shall be judged by those whom he had so cruelly injured, and bruised

under their feet in whose final destruction he expected to triumph.

How admirable is the order of its privileges! It is provided in it, that renovation of nature, and grace from above, shall prepare the elect for every duty of obedience; and that the participation of some of its blessings shall give to our obedience all the impulse of gratitude, and the expectation of others shall impart to it all the animation of hope. In this review, the covenant appears like a paradise laid out in such a mode as conduces at once to pleasure and utility. In one division of this paradise there are flowers of exquisite scent to delight us by their fragrance,—in another there are nutritive plants to sustain us by their fruit,—in another there are herbs, of a medicinal quality for healing our diseases,—in another there are trees, under whose shade we may rest amid the heat of noon,—and in another there are fountains of living water, where our thirst may be quenched, and our impurities may be washed away.

3. It is sure. Covenants among men are very uncertain, and are often kept no longer than while they do not interfere with the claims of interest and ambition. Nations whose rulers have agreed that there shall be perpetual amity and peace betwixt them, have in a very short period, after the ratification of such treaties, carried fire and sword into each other's borders. Contracts of a more private nature are often infringed or set aside when it is found that the fulfilment of them will be attended with difficulties and losses which were not anticipated. The discovery of these excites the ingenuity of the unprincipled to find some flaw for the dissolution of the obligation: but no

such causes can lead to the breach of this covenant. It is as much above human agreements in stability as it is in every other valuable quality. Were it uncertain, how would this lessen the value of its blessings, and mar the happiness of those who place in it their all. The Saviour who contracted for us in it is the way, the truth, and the life,—the blood which ratified it is that of the Lamb of God,—the grace which administers it is grace which reigns to eternal life,—and the Being to whom it unites us cannot be influenced to cast us away by any caprice in himself or any suggestion of others. Thy friends may deal deceitfully with thee, their vows of attachment may be violated, and their promises of service be forgotten, thy mountain which stood strong may depart, the hills to which thine eyes were raised in confident expectation may be removed, but his kindness shall not depart from thee, "neither shall the covenant of his peace be removed."* Short is the continuance of the rainbow in the clouds. While we are charmed by the beauty and the variety of its colours, the clear shining of the sun banishes the cloud from the sky, or the collected tempest blackens the whole heaven, but that which surrounds the throne of grace is durable as that throne itself. He hath ordained his covenant to be for ever.

II. I proceed now to speak of the believer's interest in this covenant.

I. David declares that God had made this covenant with him. In the day of conversion, God manifests

* Isaiah liv. 10.

this covenant to the objects of his mercy, inclines them to trust in its righteousness, and to submit to its moral influence, by its grace renovates their natures, and unites them to himself in faith and love.—Such is the mode in which God connects us in state and heart with himself, and such it was in the days of David. Though at that time it was seen in comparative obscurity, and though its ratification in the Mediator's blood was only typified in the sacrifices of that dispensation, yet it was accepted by the same faith, and exulted in by the same joy. The language in which David speaks of his interest in this covenant is not that of jealous exclusion of others, but of appropriating faith and adoring gratitude.

Happy is the situation of such persons. Of what avail is it to the blind man to hear of God's covenant with regard to day and night, seed time, and harvest. To him both are alike. It is not to him that the sun arises or declines, that the meadows blossom or the fields whiten; but far more deplorable is their state who are strangers to the covenant of promise, who hear of blessings in which they have no share, of a friendship in which they have no place, and which they cannot but contrast with the emptiness of their portion, the horrors of their curse, and the wrath which abides on them.

At this moment David had the assurance of his interest in this covenant. Sometimes good men imagine that their union with the Deity is a delusion, or that if there was a reality in it, they have provoked him to cast them away; but an interest in this covenant cannot be forfeited, and such gloomy impres-

sions shall, in the zealous and patient use of appointed means, give place to the full persuasion of faith and hope.

2. He viewed it as containing all his salvation. Every blessing of salvation is in it. Righteousness which magnifies the law, holiness which conforms us to the Saviour, wisdom which is the unerring guide to happiness, peace which passeth all understanding, victory in death, mercy in judgment, and eternal happiness in heaven, are secured in it for the objects of God's mercy. It was not because this covenant secured the stability of his throne, or the glory of his family, that David thus viewed it; but because he saw in it the pledge of the happiness of his soul, and of his welfare through eternity.

Covenants among men have generally for their object the restoration or the security of some particular advantage; and the gaining of this is no step to the attainment of any other. That object may be gained, and other interests may be left to the fatal effects of our own folly, or of the enmity of others. But in this covenant there is every thing pertaining to life and godliness, to every part of man's nature, to every variety in his lot, and to every period of his being.

Some of the covenants among men may be said to be covenants of destruction. The soldier who receives a mortal wound in the field of battle, the family which is robbed of its all by a rapacious foe, the wife and children left in penury and despair, have cursed such leagues in the bitterness of their spirits. Bonds have been framed for uniting conspirators in the murder of

the innocent. But from such deeds of darkness and cruelty we turn with delight to the covenant of peace, the covenant of him who might have destroyed us with justice, but who saves us in the multitude of his mercy. There is a remedy in it for all the miseries of man, and a happiness in it for every vessel of mercy. In the exhibition of this covenant salvation is offered; in uniting us to God in its spirit salvation is begun; and in the full execution of it salvation is completed.

3. He declares that this covenant was all his desire. This expresses the delight and joy which he felt in it. In every part of this covenant good men feel the utmost complacency. The Mediator of it is their beloved and their friend; the blood of it is their only hope; its promises are sweeter than honey from the comb; its laws are not only holy and just, but good; its blessings are more precious than the finest gold; and even its corrections are dear to the enlightened mind, as the salutary chastenings of a Father's wisdom.

What is the delight which monarchs have felt in treaties for the consolidation of their empires or the glory of their reign, compared with what good men feel in this covenant? David formed alliances with some neighbouring monarchs whom he deemed worthy of his friendship, and from whom he expected assistance in important undertakings; but it was not on these that his mind reposed with peace and satisfaction, but on this, and this alone. This delight is honourable to the bounty and the faithfulness of God, and it is increased, not lessened, by indulgence.

The expression also intimates that it is the desire of

good men to have their acquaintance with this covenant extended, and their experience of its blessings enlarged. The counsels of the ungodly, the imaginations of the romantic, and the devices of the factious, excite our pity or our abhorrence; but the more good men inquire into this covenant, the more do they desire to search farther into it. Our acquaintance with leagues among men often leads us only farther into the knowledge of their intrigues; but the more we know of this covenant, the more do we see of his glory who is full of grace and truth; and though it brings to view melancholy instances of human instability and treachery, it shews us the faithful God reclaiming the perfidious, and grace triumphing over the power of depravity.

III. I proceed now, in the third place, to shew what consolation this covenant yields under domestic trials, and in the views of death.

1. It yields comfort amidst the unworthy conduct of the members of families. With this severe affliction David was called, on various occasions, to struggle. The horrid defilement of Tamar by Amnon, and the rebellion of Absalom, made him lament, in the bitterness of his soul, that his house was disgraced by crimes. The most agonizing sorrow of pious parents is that which proceeds from this source. When the daughter whom they laboured to form to the love of excellence is enticed into lewdness; when, in defiance of the censure of the world, and their most solemn entreaties, she will not shun the company of her seducer; when she refuses to be ashamed, or seeks in

dissipation a refuge from remorse; and when they contrast this with the picture they had drawn of her as the virtuous mother of a happy family, and as the kind and unwearied nurse of their decline, the anguish is more severe than could have been felt at her grave. When the son on whose education they expended large sums, whom they placed in a situation of respectable employment and ample support, and into whom they had instilled the principles of religious belief, becomes idle and extravagant, associates with the turbulent and the profligate, ridicules the truths which they taught him to venerate, and seeks in iniquity the means of gratification to his vices,—there is a bitterness felt equal to that which wrings the heart in mourning for the death of an only child. But though such trials may draw down on parents the scorn of the base, the malignant, and the cruel,—and though such incidents may make others relinquish all intercourse with their families, who might have been expected to have been more considerate and charitable,—yet they are not left comfortless. This covenant provides that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. These sad events, which rend their hearts with pangs so severe, and make their beds to swim with tears so bitter, shall promote that penitential sense of their own sinfulness which is so eminent a feature in true religion, stimulate their efforts in the pursuit of moral excellence, and increase the vigilance with which they watch over those of their children who have not turned into the paths of the destroyer.

This covenant also makes provision for the recovery

of the most abandoned. The parable of the prodigal son glows with its spirit; and the extent of its invitations, and the power of its grace, inspire the hope that the victims of vice may yet bind up, by the trembling hand of repentance, the hearts which they have broken, and teach others never to abandon in despair the most stubborn and audacious. Its power can melt the heart of a stone; its grace can save the chief of sinners.

2. It is a source of comfort when the members of a family are removed by death. This is intimated in the expression, "although he make it not to grow." It has been sometimes said, in a way of reproach, against good men, that their habits and views unfit them for that acute sensibility which others exhibit when their friends are removed by death. But grace strengthens every kind affection; and though they are kept, by their submission to the will, and their confidence in the mercy of God, from giving vent to their anguish in lamentations so wild or in gestures so outrageous, their grief is deeper, and it is more lasting. With what strong anxiety did David wait for tidings respecting Absalom! And when he found that he was dead, he manifested a grief which shews the tenderness of his heart. Absalom was a son who had few claims on his kindness, whose excesses had been the dishonour of his family, and whose rebellion had shaken his throne; yet did he mourn as if the greatest calamity had befallen him. Pious reflection brought relief to his mind, and he found solace where the good in every age have sought it, and where it is never sought in vain.

The covenant of grace secures the happy death of the good. Whatever be its place, season, or manner, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. It secures also the reunion in heaven of all friends who on earth were truly worthy of each other. The grace which unites us to God unites Christians to each other in the charity which is the bond of perfectness; and this tie is so sacred in itself, and so interwoven with the best principles of the heart, that it cannot be destroyed, but in the world of perfection shall render us more completely one.

How often hath this promise, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever," made the widow's heart to sing for joy! And that delightful assurance, "I will be a Father unto you," hath soothed the heart of the orphan, to whom the world seemed a wilderness. How often has that assurance, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,"* been the consolation of those who were sorrowing with regard to their dearest friends, that they should see their face no more!

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints: and when we visit their graves, let us think of the connexion which exists betwixt the living God and their mouldering dust, and this will fortify the mind against every gloomy suggestion.

Even when the horrible idea is forced upon the heart, that departed friends are miserable, the reflections which it produces, though painful, are salutary; and in a future world the wisdom and justice of God in all his allotments shall be seen in such a light, that

* Hosea ii. 19. 2 Cor. vi. 18. Heb. xiii. 5.

not even a wish shall be felt that the arrangements of his covenant had been different, nor shall any scene of bliss be marred because those once dear to the good are not there to share it.

3. This covenant yields comfort to good men in the view of their own departure. Death had visited the house of David already; but it was soon to appear, and to say to himself, "Thou shalt die, and not live." And with what calmness does he expect this visitant and this message! He had many advantages in the world which a carnal mind would be reluctant to leave; yet he was not merely resigned, but eager to depart; and the interests which were dear to him on earth, as well as his lot in eternity, he left with perfect confidence in the hands of him to whom he looked as his God for ever and ever.

In every age men have laboured to find out some means of fortifying the mind against the fears of death. These have been various, according to the different feelings and habits of men. Some of them have been of such a nature as to increase the terrors of the last enemy; and the inefficacy of them all has been attested by the distracting anxiety which knew not where to look for refuge. It is only in this covenant that a remedy can be found for the anxieties of nature or the terrors of guilt. We have been told of the placid deaths of men of the world, and of the courage which philosophers have shewn in the last struggle. With little reason do they ridicule the use which is made of the triumphant deaths of the pious, who can boast of a stupidity so gross and of a confidence so presumptuous as theirs. The peace of the

good in death is so sweet, there is such a humility in their hope, and such a modesty in their rapture, that they must have a mind as blind as their taste is depraved, whom it does not strongly interest. The deaths which the world deems most glorious are like the blaze of fire, a momentary splendour before hideous ruin; but the death of the good is like the going down of the sun, which sets to rise in glory.

How sweet is this language of a dying saint! "I see the chariot of the wood of Lebanon waiting at my bedside to convey my soul to the land of Emmanuel; and though my body should be carried to the grave in the humblest form, my Lord shall come in due time to raise it, and to fashion it like to his own." Amidst all the thoughts which may come into his mind concerning his family, the promises of the covenant respecting the children of the pious bid him hope the best in reference to them; and as for the religious and moral interests which he was eager to promote, he feels assured that God will, by other instruments, plead the cause of truth and righteousness. David died in the faith of Messiah's first coming to purchase salvation; and good men under the new dispensation die looking for his mercy to eternal life.

CONCLUSION.

Let good men be thankful to God that he hath made this covenant with them. Truly the lines are fallen to you in pleasant places, and you have a goodly heritage. You were utterly unworthy of this privilege; and so far from having any wish for it, you said to God, "Depart from us, for we desire not

the knowledge of thy ways." Yet did he draw you to himself.

Exhibit the excellences of this covenant to others, and labour to persuade them to take hold of it. A parent cannot have a tranquil mind while he has reason to think that his children are strangers to God. You would not wish them to cast in their lot among the wicked; you know that this would involve them in guilt and misery at present, and would issue in their being finally gathered with sinners. A better preservative there cannot be from such associations than joining themselves to the Lord. A soul taught to appreciate the value, and to relish the pleasures of religion, will see nothing in the fairest scenes of the world but vanity to disappoint, or temptations to ensnare.

Beware of seeking your consolation in other sources. Seek not comfort from the world. David possessed the wealth and honours of a kingly station, but he looked not to them for solace to his heart. It was not merely when he was leaving them all in death that he turned away from them; but even in the calamities of life he sought better supports than they could afford. Some have tried to cheer themselves in affliction by vicious indulgence; but did David call up his transgressions to view, to embolden his mind or to gratify his heart? Thence came the tempests which shook his throne; and if thorns were strewed on his death-bed pillow, it was there they grew. The jovial may invite you to their revels, and the gay allure you to their sports, but these can produce only a momentary oblivion of sorrow: it will return with tenfold

severity. It is a more wretched expedient, to have recourse to any evil indulgence in secret as a relief from the anguish arising from the misconduct of friends; for thus one vice is made the remedy for the miseries of another. Let your consolations be such as religion either furnishes or sanctions. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

Walk worthy of your privileges and comforts. Let it not be said, from your conduct, that the consolations of the covenant render men indifferent about the obligations of the law. "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts."* And for what purpose are they placed there? Not that they may be buried out of sight, but that they may purify all the springs of action, and control all the pursuits of life. It is the glory of this covenant, that it is as much distinguished by the number and the power of its motives to holiness, as by the riches and sweetness of its consolations. By a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality. "Let all things be done decently, and in order."† Let every duty be performed in its proper season and place. Much of the beauty of a virtuous life depends on the regular exercise of its graces. Beware lest there be any thing in your conduct which profligate connexions can bring forward in apology for their excesses, or to justify their contempt of your admonitions. Having obtained

* Heb. viii. 10. † 1 Cor. xvi. 40.

so many of the blessings of salvation already, despair not of your possessing what remains in due time. Salvation full and free is the substance of this covenant; it is the glory of the Gospel, it is the hope of earth, it is the triumph of heaven. In studying this covenant in the light of glory, you will feel how inadequate your present wonder and gratitude were.

Finally. Let me beseech all unconverted persons to enter into covenant with God. While without an interest in it, you are strangers to its comforts. All may be tranquil and gay around you at present, and you may imagine that you need not these consolations; but in an hour that ye think not, affliction and death may enter your dwelling. And, ah! how agonizing will be your reflections, amidst the shame and anguish produced by the profligacy of relatives, that you did nought to preserve them from it; nay, that by your irreligion you led the way to it! The wicked man's anguish in misfortune and death bears a solemn testimony to the wisdom of those who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them.

You are under the covenant of works, and this can give no comfort in family afflictions. Its voice in them is, "Seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. As they were increased, so they sinned against me; therefore will I change their glory into shame."* Will it give any comfort in dying? Its voice is, "The wages of sin is death." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to

* Hosea, iv. 6, 7.

do them."* The covenant of works binds over all who die under it to destruction, even to everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. It provides for the misery of all who live and die under it, the chains of darkness, the cup of fury, and the lake of fire. Incline your ears, therefore, and come unto Christ: hear, and your souls shall live; and he will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

* Gal. iii. 10.

DISCOURSE XXII.

THE INFLUENCE OF HOLY AND HAPPY SCENES.

LUKE ix. 32, 33.—*But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.*

IT has often been remarked, as an evidence of the candour and integrity of the sacred writers, that they detail, without the least apology or palliation, the infirmities and faults of those for whose respectability they might have been supposed to be most solicitous. In the most upright of other historians it is easy to discover the reluctance with which they relate aught that has a tendency to lower their favourite characters, their anxiety to specify the circumstances which led to it, and their ingenuity to clothe it in a form the least repulsive. But the sacred writers were directed of Heaven uniformly to maintain that calm impartiality which became the function they were exercising, and to guard against every thing which might shake the authenticity of their statements, or weaken the effect of their moral admonitions. They never employ the least tint of the colours of partiality or

friendship, nor do they lose sight, in a single instance, of that fidelity which is the first duty in a historian.

A striking example of this is presented in the text. Had the narrative of the transfiguration been a fable, the fabricators of it would have exhibited the disciples marking the whole scene with lively interest, and labouring to catch from Moses and Elias a portion of that light and fervour which they displayed. But it is certain, that on this occasion they gave a melancholy proof of human weakness; and this is narrated without any excuse for conduct so unbecoming. In Moses and Elias we perceive nothing which does not accord with that state of perfection which they had reached; but in the three disciples we see the frailties and the errors of mortality; and these are recorded, not to degrade them in our estimation, but to check that superstitious veneration for them which their being selected to accompany our Lord might have produced, and to teach us humility and caution.

In the following discourse I shall make some remarks explanatory of the text, and shall then illustrate some of the practical lessons which it suggests.

I. In explanation of this text your attention may be directed to four topics.

1. Let us consider the state of the disciples during a part of this scene. They were heavy with sleep. As the transfiguration took place during the night, and as the disciples might be fatigued with the labours of the preceding day, and with climbing to the top of Tabor, which one of the evangelists calls an

exceeding high mountain, they felt a drowsiness to which they at last yielded. It would appear, too, that our Lord spent some time in prayer before the transfiguration. His mind was pure and spiritual, and required not any effort to abstract it from worldly objects, or to fix it in holy contemplation; but he chose to engage in prayer, as the exercise best suited to the scene which was to follow, and that he might teach his disciples to regard devotion as the surest prelude to divine manifestations. Conversation of an animated kind will, in many cases, keep the attention awake; but their Master was now pouring out his heart to his Father, and, from the modesty of his temper, it is not likely that they were able to hear the language of his earnest devotion. Providence permitted them thus to sleep, as there might be something said in the commencement of the conference betwixt their Master and the heavenly visitants which they were not prepared to hear, and which Jesus intended to explain to them afterwards.

In indulging this drowsiness they were blameable; for this was to defeat, as far as they could, our Lord's object in taking them along with him. For how could they bear witness to what they had not seen? And had they not been awakened, the whole scene would have been lost to them. It appears that all the three were in this situation, and that there was not one of them in a condition to rouse and to admonish the rest.

2. Our attention is next required to the great privilege with which they were favoured. They saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.

Jesus might have punished them by allowing them to sleep till all was over; but he acted to them in a manner which beautifully accords with his patience and indulgence. His gentleness and mercy, manifested during this scene of splendour, give us the most delightful evidence that no elevation can keep him from remembering that we are dust.

They saw his glory. That face which they had often seen pale with fatigue, or sad with grief, they now beheld shining as the sun. They had often marked, with indignation and sorrow, the insults he received from men; and it must have been with the greatest rapture they now beheld glory, far brighter than any which earth could furnish, spread over him. They saw the two men that stood with him. How interesting to behold two messengers from heaven, in whom they could trace the light and affections of that state; to see Moses and Elias, the objects of their earliest veneration; and to view them paying homage to their Master, whom the scribes and the priests opposed and reviled!

The joy felt in this scene must have been heightened by surprise. Their eyes were opened on it, not as it was preparing, but in its full splendour. The feelings of the man who should fall asleep in a tempest and awake in the sweetest calm,—or of him who should be conveyed, while asleep, from a dungeon to his home, and open his eyes, not on nakednesss, gloom, and solitude, but on his family and dwelling,—could not fully represent the emotions of the disciples.

3. Let us attend to the proposal of Peter. It is obvious from it that Peter was enraptured with this

scene; and as he saw Moses and Elias departing, he could not bear that it should so quickly terminate, but proposed that tents should be provided for their accommodation. In this proposal there was nothing selfish. He did not make it because he contemplated this as a scene where he and his brethren would be perfectly safe from the jealousy and malice of the Jews; neither does he express any solicitude for his own accommodation. He could submit to any exposure and to any privation, if his Lord was supplied with suitable conveniences.

It is peculiarly worthy of our notice, that he does not insinuate any wish that he and his brethren should have the least share in this glory, but was willing to remain unnoticed and unhonoured, if his Master and the two attendants from heaven were clothed with majesty. Nor does he propose that these tabernacles should be raised by the power of his Master, but that they should be constructed by his companions and himself. He counted no labour degrading which was devoted to such a Master as he served, and none could be oppressive or tiresome which was brightened by such a scene. That Moses and Elias should shine while *they* toiled, excited not one envious feeling.

Peter was conscious that this scene had a salutary influence over his own mind and that of his brethren, in detaching them from the vanities and cares of the world, and was eager to remain where such impressions might be strengthened. Worldly cares he had found producing agitation and perplexity, and worldly vanities had led him to expectations and wishes on

which his Lord had frowned; but here there was a scene in which he might delight with safety.

To him also the glory of his Master was very dear. It was with great reluctance that he had heard him predict his further humiliation. He might consider this scene as an indication that a brighter destiny was now opening to his Lord, and to his cause; and he wished to remain on a spot where Christ appeared in somewhat of his due splendour.

It is worthy of remark, that Peter submits this proposal to his Master. "If thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles," is the form in which the evangelist Matthew represents him as making the proposal. The temper of Peter was rash and sanguine; yet such was his reverence for his Lord's authority, his confidence in his wisdom, and his regard to his will, that much as his heart was set on the continuance of this scene, he would not take a single step for this purpose without his sanction. It is easy to refer to Providence the arrangements in which we feel little interest, and from which we expect little pleasure; but to submit to it that on which our happiness depends, requires a high measure of confidence and love.

4. Let us consider the censure passed on this proposal of Peter as inconsiderate. Had Peter reflected, it would have struck him that this proposal was neither suitable to the heavenly visitants, nor to his Master, nor to himself and his companions.

How strange is it that Peter should have imagined that Moses and Elias could be detained in such a world as ours, or that they required such accommo-

dations as we do! He did not err in conceiving that Moses and Elias felt supreme delight in the society of Christ; but he should have remembered that they had duties to discharge among the just made perfect, and enjoying, as he had done, the heavenly conversation of his Lord, he should have had ideas of the habits of the blessed more refined and lofty than those of the carnal Jews.

Had he reflected, he must have seen that the glories of this scene, splendid as it was, were not all to which our Lord was entitled; and that though all Israel had come to worship round the foot of this mountain, it was not the honour which Christ had contemplated. Jesus, too, had often told them of the necessity of his death; they had heard the two heavenly visitants speaking of the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem; and they had seen the various blessings which were imparted wherever he went by his doctrine and miracles; and it was foolish to imagine, that he would abandon for this splendour labours which had been so beneficial, or that for its sake he would shrink from that doom which he had all along anticipated as the redemption of the world, and as the triumph of his love.

And with regard to Peter and his brethren, the granting of this wish would have separated them from all their friends and employments on earth, and consecrated the remainder of their life to inactive contemplation. Instead of that course of labour and suffering in which so many were brought to the knowledge of salvation, and their names rendered illustrious as zealous champions of the cross, public bene-

factors to the world, and spiritual fathers to thousands, they would have lived and died in uselessness and seclusion. The idea that eminent piety is too delicate for intercourse with this world, and that the lonely place is its best sphere, and indolence and austerity its proper fruits, had its origin in the superstition of the dark ages, and has no countenance either in the life or precepts of Him who went about doing good, and required his disciples to let " their light so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, might glorify their Father which is in heaven."

Peter's mind was too agitated by surprise and rapture for sober reflection, and his proposal shews us amiable feelings impetuous and ill-directed.

II. I proceed now to set before you some of the practical lessons which this passage suggests.

1. It shews us what scenes of pure delight may be found in the most afflicted lot. Never was there sorrow on earth like to our Lord's sorrow, and yet his humbled state was sometimes marked by the brightness of glory. His disciples, whom he called to share his toils, privations, and reproaches, had his joy imparted to them. Like a kind parent, eager that his family may participate in all that gladdens him, he delighted to communicate whatever was fitted to encourage their hearts, and to shew them what was adapted to elevate their minds.

The poorest family, that is pious, industrious, and contented, sees much of the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Before them nature spreads out its beauties, and it is to those who are debarred

from the pomp and splendour of life that they appear most attractive. Sweet to such a family are the humblest plants which blossom round their habitation; and pleasing are the melodies which mingle with their morning devotions, and summon them to their morning toils. To the poor the Gospel is preached, and it is on them that the Sabbath dawns with peace in its rays. Those who are shut out from other sources of knowledge must feel peculiar interest in the lessons of the sanctuary. The heavier their toils the sweeter must be this pause; and the neglect and obscurity in which the week is spent in their families are forgotten while they mingle with the household of faith, and feel that they are one with them in Christ Jesus. The recovery of a child from disease, agreeable intelligence from children at a distance, their return to their home in comfort, the visit of a friend, success in any enterprise on which their hearts were set, are events adapted to excite pleasing sensations.

And when you think on the seasons in which the characters of Christ are exhibited to the soul in such a light as to fill it with love and joy; in which the promises of the Gospel raise the heart to the full assurance of hope; and in which the wonders of redeeming mercy fill the mind with rapture; you must see that the troubles of the good bear no proportion to their comforts and blessings.

Tell me not of the storms which threaten you. "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest;" and say not that the scenes through which you pass are barren and dreary; for the Lord Jesus shall be "as rivers of water in a

dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."* If the bleak mountain was made the scene of rapture to the disciples, let this encourage your faith in God while removed to situations the most unpromising at his call. He can make the wilderness to rejoice, and the desert to blossom.

I am led by the incident before us to point out to you, that these holy and happy scenes are intended by Providence to prepare us for days of darkness. You see the good of his chosen to fit you for sustaining calmly worldly disappointments; and you behold dear relatives happy in the Divine favour, that you may witness their sickness and death with patience and hope.

2. It shews us how much may be lost by our own folly in circumstances the most favourable to our consolation and improvement. Peter's rapture at what he saw was mingled with regret for what he had lost while he slumbered. How much is lost by indulging in sleep during divine worship! The truths which are delivered while men slumber, might have had the most beneficial influence on their minds. There is no outward splendour to dazzle,—no heavenly language to charm,—but the glory of God is here exhibited as shining in the face of Jesus, the wonders of his cross are displayed, and life and immortality are brought to light.

It will be a heavy charge against the habitual sleeper in the house of prayer, that divine worship was profaned by his sluggishness; that of so much of

* Is. xxxii. 2.

the time which Jehovah claims for himself he was thus defrauded by the sinner's folly; and that the most melting entreaties and solemn warnings could not keep him awake. And as God would not protract this scene on the mount, that Peter might be compensated for the time he had lost in sleep, so religious opportunities will not be prolonged even to those most solicitous to redeem the time they have spent in sluggishness. Two instances are recorded of Peter's slumbering in scenes the most interesting; but how many are written in God's book of remembrance of the slumbers of others in sacred exercises. There are some so addicted to it, that rare is that service in which they are awake during the whole of it, or even strive to be so. There are other methods beside this by which men deprive themselves of the benefits which they might have derived from religious ordinances. Their minds wander during divine service after worldly objects, or they are so occupied with what they see around them, that they pay no regard to the preacher's message. Their eyes are not closed in slumber, but they run to and fro in such a manner as to shew that there is nothing in the sanctuary of God to interest or to fix the heart for a moment. While angels are looking into the wonders of man's salvation, men are listless; and while the days of the Son of Man are hastening away, many act as if they could arrest or recall them at their pleasure.

3. How gracious and indulgent is the Lord Jesus to his people! There are none of them who have not reason as well as Peter to acknowledge his long-suffering and his tenderness. He hath favoured you

with displays of his glory when you were not cherishing the spirit, nor engaged in the exercises which are its usual preludes; delivered you from temptations of whose perilous nature you were then unconscious; and blessed you under afflictions for which you made no efforts to prepare. Where Peter deserved a sharp rebuke he received none; and where we had reason to expect the language of severity and terror, we have heard that of kindness and encouragement. He is slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and he will not chide always, nor often.

Let us beware of abusing this indulgence; but let it stimulate our solicitude to employ every faculty and every moment in his service, and let us imitate it in our temper and conduct. Unseemly in us will be the arrogance, peevishness, and severity, which withhold instruction, or warning, or comfort, where no desire was expressed for them, which disdain to impress the careless, and which make no distinction betwixt inadvertency and scorn.

4. How delightful is communion with Jesus Christ! Peter had many ties to the world; there lived his family and friends, to whom a man of his warmth of feeling must have been strongly attached, and to whom the kind affections of the Lord Jesus to his mother must often have guided his heart amidst the journeys he took, and the counsels he heard, yet he loses sight of them all amidst the splendours of this scene.

The scene of communion with the Saviour is that of the good man's chief joy, by the information which it communicates, the affections which it calls forth,

the expressions of endearment and assurances of safety by which it is marked, and the hopes which it inspires. Amidst the delights of fellowship with Jesus, the heaviest afflictions cease from troubling, and the most alluring enjoyments of the world spread their enticements in vain. In this situation a good man will not long forget his family, but will feel pious solicitude mingling with his rapture, that they also may taste that the Lord is gracious.

In this scene also there is a communion with saints on earth and in heaven. Our admiration is kindled by the same objects; our joys flow from the same source; our wishes are pointed to the same things; and mutual love binds us to one another. O happy is that family where heart mingles with heart, not only in natural affection, but in the feelings of the Gospel, and in the joys of salvation! It is owing to the carnality of our minds that we look with so much interest on the worship of a multitude, and with so little on that of two or three gathered together in Christ's name. Think how many hearts throughout the world are mingling with theirs at the cross, and how many voices are rising with theirs at the throne; and the redeemed from among men are only nearer to their object, and more perfect in their song!

And if communion with Jesus and his church be so delightful now, what will it be in heaven, where there will be no veil betwixt us; where there will be no corruption and no fear to mar it; where Christ will display a glory too dazzling for this our mortal state; and crown us with loving-kindness and tender mercies suited, not to the scene of discipline, but of final re-

ward! Then we shall associate, not only with Moses and Elias, but with all the glorified saints; and not only hear their discourse, but bear a part in it; we shall not only see their homage to the Saviour, but join in it; and never shall we behold them departing from us. The regret of the disciples at the termination of this scene can give no idea of what would be felt in heaven at the suspicion of the passing away of its glories, or the suspension of its intercourse; but even the fear of this cannot exist for one moment, or ever rise in one heart. "So shall we be for ever with the Lord,"* is a sentence which exhibits the bliss, and seals the duration of that state. In such a scene the blessed can no more cast a wishful eye back on this world, than the liberated captive can do so on his dungeon, or the returning prodigal on his wants and toils.

5. This passage shews us, that saints in heaven shall know one another. By what means Moses and Elias were known to the disciples we cannot determine. It may have been suggested to them by something said in their conference with our Lord, or it might be intimated to them by the Holy Spirit; for the language used by Peter shewed that he did know them, and felt, in regard to them, the most affectionate emotions. Their appearance excited not the least degree of that horror with which visitants from the other world have been regarded. Nought was felt at seeing them but confidence, love, and joy. Heaven is a social state; and in order to our happiness in any

* 1 Thess. iv. 17.

scene, we must have some knowledge of those with whom we are mingled. I may add, that the intercourse among the blessed would of itself lead to this knowledge, if it was not imparted at its commencement; and that the review of the dealings of Providence and grace with each individual, and the grateful acknowledgments to which this must give rise, will make every one familiar with the history and the feelings of his companions. How delightful will it be to be associated in heaven with those whose history we loved to trace on earth; with Joseph, whose eventful story we read with such searching of heart; with David, who first taught us the songs of Zion; and with Paul, from whom we learned to glory in the cross of Christ! And it cannot be supposed that we will know them, and remain ignorant of the friends with whom we mingled here. The apostle Paul intimates, that the converts in the churches which he planted should be his "joy and crown."* This language of his clearly shews that these should be known to him for whose salvation he had laboured; and that in their gratitude to him as the instrument of it, he should experience a triumph far more gratifying than any that ever rewarded the efforts of any earthly conqueror.

Christ's delivering the young man at Nain to his mother, was certainly intended to confirm the hope, that pious connexions in heaven shall be happy with each other. This act of the Saviour's shewed his delight in healing the wounds which calamity hath

* 1 Thess ii. 19

made, in reuniting the friends whom death hath separated, and in renewing the intercourse which the last enemy hath interrupted. I shall only refer, in confirmation of these views, to the language and conduct of David at the death of his child. When that event was announced, his agony of grief subsided, and he said, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."* Merely going to his child in the grave could neither have produced that calm, nor was worthy of such a profession. It was the hope of joining him in heaven which thus cheered him, and which he has recorded for the encouragement of bereaved parents.

These passages shew, that this hope is not a vain dream, but is sanctioned by the word of God. How delightful will it be to recognize those in glory who first brought us in their arms to Christ, and led us so far in the way to Zion; to embrace the child with whom your dearest earthly hopes went down to the dust; to be associated with the partner whose heart was yours; with the brother or the sister, the companion and the friend, whose sympathy heightened every enjoyment and alleviated every woe! It is some consolation to us to think, that our unconscious dust shall be mingled with theirs; but much more delightful is the hope, that our spirits, active and conscious, shall be associated with their spirits; that from the same mount we shall look back on the way in which the Lord led us in the wilderness; and that,

* 2 Sam. xii. 23.

amidst the wonderful alterations wrought on them by the Spirit of glory, we shall find them in love unchanged.

This statement of the mutual knowledge of the blessed, gives beauty to the doctrine of the resurrection, and heightens our impressions of the heavenly felicity. To the feeling heart it is unspeakably soothing, and it can be set at nought only by the philosopher, who is too sober to regard the emotions of nature; or the enthusiast, who is too elevated to indulge them.

6. How apt are we to take up our rest in the scene of enjoyment! Peter loses sight of all the duties which the function he had been called to imposed on him, and wished for nothing but that the bliss and the splendour which now surrounded him might be perpetual. How apt are those in youth to say of its cheering scenes, "It is good for us to be here," as if the spring would pause, or the sun stand still for them. How apt are families in comfortable circumstances to use this language when their houses are safe from fear; when their children are gay, their wealth is increasing, and their friendship is courted; not remembering how soon the profligacy of a child may cover them with shame, or his death fill their eyes with tears; how soon misfortune may spoil them of their property, and calumny blast their reputation. How apt, too, are we to entertain such a feeling as this in regard to the place where we meet with God, forgetting that we must serve our generation according to his will; and that it is not merely by devo-

tional emotion, however ecstatic, that we are prepared for heaven, but by purity of manners, and by active goodness.

Changes which disappoint our fondest hopes are needful; that, feeling we have here no continuing city, we may seek more earnestly for one that is to come. Our mansions are only to be found in our Father's house. They are necessary also to qualify us for the more exquisite enjoyment of the heavenly felicity, and for occupying a higher place in its services and its honours. Rest is sweetest to him who hath borne the burden and heat of the day; and the haven is most delightful to him whose voyage has been long, stormy, and perilous. It is the will of Heaven, that through manifold tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God; and could we ask the blessed on high, who passed to glory through the sharpest sufferings and most painful disappointments, if they now wish that their course on earth had been less arduous and afflictive, their answer would be this,—"He hath done all things well."

7. We are here taught, that even in holy and happy scenes, wishes may be felt and expressed, the granting of which would be dishonouring to the Saviour, and hurtful to ourselves. In the season of religious enjoyment, our passions may excite many false impressions of our present condition, and of our future destiny, and may cover these with the most specious pretexts. We wish that our communion with Christ may never be interrupted, but we forget that while here we must walk by faith, and not by sight.

We wish that no temptations may annoy us, and that our course of duty may be smoothed to us, forgetting that without a struggle there can be no conquest, and that the way of the Lord is strength to the upright.

We wish to be removed from scenes where we are disquieted and harassed by perverse and unreasonable men, but it is in such circumstances that meekness and charity are exercised and cultivated, and that the ignorance of the foolish, and the petulance of the froward, are silenced.

Let us not imagine that the solemnity or the rapture of any scene will stamp all our wishes with wisdom. We must weigh them well. You have marked the foolish desires of children, and how destructive the granting of many of them would prove; and let us think how idle many of ours appear to superior beings, and that, with a guide which childhood hath not, ours have not their excuse. Let us not be rash in uttering them before God; and when we do express them, let it be with humble submission to our Master's will and wisdom. We can never err when we pray for what God hath commanded or promised; but we often ask amiss when we obey the impulse of our own passions; and it is wisest, and safest, and best, for us to say, without being too minute in our requests,—"Let the Lord do with me what seemeth good in his sight." To refer all to him honours his wisdom and love; and they who thus trust him will succeed far better than those who, in their presumption and solicitude, prescribe to him what should be given and what should be done.

CONCLUSION.

Let good men, instead of complaining that their scenes of joy have been so few, reflect with wonder and gratitude that they have had so many. Let them guard against every indulgence which may lead to sluggishness in divine worship. Be sober; be vigilant. Instead of unusual indulgence in the refreshments of nature on the Lord's day, it will be wise for you to be more sparing; and instead of excessive exertion on the day before it, which must leave a languor both on the body and on the mind, it is fit, that, when it can be done, your toils should be sooner closed than usual.

Be thankful for any measure of communion you may have attained, and wisely improve it. Cultivate piety among your friends. Thus only will you have comfort in them here, or meet them in heaven hereafter. In the intercourse of the blessed, there will be no recollections more tender than those which call up the piety by which we were led to seek the kingdom of God. It is not the mere intercourse of kindness which will there be renewed, but that which was animated by the spirit, maintained in the exercises, and directed to the promoting of religion.

Be more solicitous about utility than indulgence, and about God's glory than your own ease. Mourn over the folly of your wishes, the errors of your prayers, and the rashness and selfishness by which they have been often stained. Commit yourselves to the guidance of the Spirit of wisdom and grace, and hunger and thirst more for righteousness than for en-

joyment, for this is the surest way to be filled with both.

Let unconverted men know, that God marks their carnality and indifference in his worship; that Christ can have no more fellowship with them in their present state than light hath with darkness; that religious friends will disown them, and wicked ones only aggravate their misery. The indignation and horror which will be felt in recognising in hell the associate that corrupted and ruined them, may be conceived to be of the most agonizing kind, and participation in sin will be remembered by those who are mingled in torment.

Your worldly desires may be gratified to the ruin of your souls. How wretched was the state of the rich man, who had every enjoyment here which the world could bestow, when in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, and found that his wish for a monitor to be sent to his brethren could no more be granted than the one for his own relief! Let his fate warn you now of the sad result of a life of folly. For them that live without God in the world, there can be no other portion than everlasting destruction from his presence. O flee, then, from sin and wrath, and give up yourselves to the service of Jesus, and to the influence of his Spirit, saying, "Let us go up to the mount of the Lord, for he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.

APPENDIX.

A

FATHER'S MEMORIAL.

The following memoir was written several years ago, and the author has been induced to publish it as an appendix to this volume. In writing discourses for families, it was natural for him to have his mind often turned to him whose virtues were the blessing of his dwelling, and in whose character many of the excellencies here recommended were beautifully exhibited. He wishes it to be viewed, not merely as a tribute to the piety of the dead, but as a means of moral utility to the living. The surviving friends of the deceased will perceive, he trusts, the correctness of the likeness, here presented, of one, the impression of whose worth no time can efface; while the facts here stated will suggest to such readers as knew him not such a full idea of a wise and good man as to render all encomium unnecessary. It has been written under the strong impulse of filial piety, but with a strict regard to that delicacy which forbids the disclosure of all, however amiable, which is fit only for the ear of relatives, and represses every eulogy which it is unseemly for a Son to offer to a Father.

The Rev. John Belfrage was born at Colliston, in the parish of Orwell, Kinross-shire, February 2d,

1736. His father was a man distinguished by his good sense and public spirit; and in the affairs of the neighbourhood he uniformly took an active part, promoting improvements, conciliating differences, and managing the interests of the young committed by dying parents to his care. His mother was the only child of the Rev. Andrew Ure, minister of Fossaway, a man who is still talked of in that parish and neighbourhood as eminent for talents, piety, and ministerial fidelity. Great pains were bestowed on her education; and while she was trained to the accomplishments becoming her sex, to gratify her father, and under the impulse, too, of a superior taste, she cultivated classical literature. This was the recreation of her leisure hours, and was never permitted to interfere with her domestic duties. Her acquirements were never displayed in the spirit of vain glory, nor had she aught of that pedantry in her manner which in man is ridiculous, but in a female is disgusting.—With a capacity to discern and admire the beauty and sublimity of ancient works of genius, the comfort of her family was in no instance neglected, and her attire and manner were uniformly marked by a beautiful propriety. In her, good sense, enlargement of mind, and fervent piety, were associated with all the gentler dispositions. The tuition of such a mother must be of the greatest value to the young. Instead of fostering any foolish prejudice, she will labour to instil enlightened ideas of God and of society; and so far from learning aught that is coarse on the one hand, or affected on the other, in speech or manners, they will be taught that easy gracefulness which renders

the demeanour so agreeable. The tenderness of her heart gives her peculiar powers of persuasion; and religion never appears so lovely to a child as when its ardour glows on a mother's countenance, nor its lessons so melting as when they are followed by her prayers, and enforced by her tears.

She marked with pleasure the early predilection which he discovered for the holy ministry. This tendency was not the result of any influence on her part, or of mere caprice on his, but was his steady purpose from his earliest years. She had seen that office adorned in the character of her father, and that her son might be a good minister of Jesus Christ was her highest ambition. With this view she laboured to form pious sentiments in his mind, and to cherish devout feelings in his heart; and the early symptoms of grace gave her a pleasure far superior to all she experienced in any indications of intellectual ability.

This inclination to the ministry was strengthened by the visits which he paid to his grandfather. Young as he was, he marked with deep interest the piety of his manner, the calmness of his dwelling, his studious habits, his delight in the service of God, and his beneficent care of his parish; nor did he ever forget the solemnity and kindness of the venerable man, when, like Jacob blessing his grandsons, he laid his hand on his head, and besought the God who had fed him all his life long to bless the child. In going to visit him on one occasion, he met with a deliverance which he remembered with lively gratitude. It was in the winter season; and in passing over a river in the way, the ice broke when he was in the middle of it, and

it was after a dreadful struggle that he and his attendant reached the bank. I have heard him state this preserving care of God in his family as a memorable instance of the condescension and goodness of Providence, and as a motive to inculcate that confidence in Him which is so rarely felt amidst the presumption of youth. Such interpositions of Heaven for the safety of the young, or of the old, produce a powerful conviction of the care of Jehovah, as in these no hand but his own is seen, and his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Another circumstance took place during his childhood which made a lasting impression on his mind. One of his father's servants, as he was returning home from the lime-kilns, was struck dead by lightning; he was conveyed to his master's house, and the sad spectacle, joined with the cries of his wife and children, whom the report of the afflictive event had brought to the place, strongly affected him. In the course of his life the remembrance of it occurred to him in every tempest of this kind, and though he was far from encouraging the tremors of ignorance or superstition, and placed unshaken confidence in Him who directs the storm, his soul was filled at such periods with solemn thought, and he censured levity on such occasions as both foolish and presumptuous. The feelings which the Psalmist labours to awaken in such scenes, by his description of a thunder-storm in the vivid and lofty style of eastern poetry, are those of reverence for the Power which manages this formidable element, and gratitude for the mercy which so often restrains its destructive energy.

After acquiring at two schools what was deemed a due preparation for academical studies, he went to the college of Edinburgh; though he was then only thirteen years of age, his proficiency was such as to secure him the high approbation of his teachers; and in spite of all the dangers to which youth and inexperience are exposed in scenes far removed from the watchful eye of relations, and where there are so many of the profane to scoff, and of the dissipated to entice, his conduct was uniformly correct and exemplary. It is not to academical discipline that parents are to look for the moral welfare of their sons, for such discipline follows them not beyond the precincts of a college, and ensures only their sobriety and regularity while under their teacher's eye, but they must, by prudent counsel and solemn admonition, excite them to that watchfulness and prayer by which many of the young have been kept untainted by the pollutions of the world. It was at this season that a strict friendship was formed betwixt him and some young men of talent who rose to eminence in the learned professions, and their improving intercourse was a source of pleasing recollection.

After completing his academical course, he engaged in the study of theology under the tuition of the Rev. James Fisher, Glasgow, who was then professor of divinity to the Associate Synod. The diligence and ability with which he pursued his studies were marked with high approbation by that venerable man. It was with evident pleasure that he spoke of his teacher, of his luminous views of divine truth, of the accuracy with which his prelections were characterized, of

the earnestness with which he exhibited the necessity of personal piety, and of the kind attentions by which he shewed his pupils that he wished them to consider him as their friend and father.

During one of the years of his studying divinity, he went as tutor to a family in one of the Western Islands of Scotland. To the two young persons under his care he felt much attached, and the manner in which he discharged his duty secured to him their lasting gratitude. They did every thing in their power to make his situation agreeable, and it was with much regret that they suffered him to depart when his duty called him to Glasgow. The distance of this place from his friends, and from the Divinity-hall, and his seclusion from religious ordinances, made him decline the most pressing invitations to return. The public services of religion were conducted in Gaelic, and he was not sufficiently acquainted with it to follow them properly. In these circumstances he entered with peculiar interest into the feelings of David in the Psalms, in which he expresses his longings for the courts of the Lord; and though he felt that the want of public ordinances can be fully compensated by no diligence in private means, with lively gratitude he acknowledged that the promise to repentant Israel had been accomplished to him, "Although I have cast them afar off, yet will I be to them a little sanctuary."

The scenery of the island was to him a source of high gratification. The lofty precipices on its shores, —the retreat of the eagle and the sea-bird; the great billows rolling to them with such fury; the roar of

the tempest, and the noise of the dashing waters; its bleak moors and scanty cultivation; its torrents and lakes; the manners and superstitions of the people, were objects which interested him deeply, and it was his labour to learn from them the lessons which they taught. When a fit opportunity was presented, he, with the prudence and modesty which will secure respect to every suggestion for improvement, pointed out what occurred to him as adapted to ameliorate the situation of the people, and always spoke with respect of the simplicity and kindness of their manners. There was a passage of Scripture on which his mind dwelt with unwearied delight, and in the objects which were daily presented to him he felt the beauty and the power of this illustration of Jehovah's care: "The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."*

It was while he was in this family that his mother died. Great as the distance was, he came to see her in her illness, but had it not in his power to remain with her till her dissolution. The parting was solemn and trying to both. She felt that she should see his face no more; and while he stood weeping by her couch, she expressed her firm hope in Christ, soothed

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* Deut. xxxii. 9—12.

him by various assurances of Divine guidance and consolation, exhorted him to a close walk with God, and with a voice which sunk into his heart, gave him a Christian mother's last blessing. In his melancholy journey back to the place of his engagement, he found reason to adopt the language of David,—"Amidst the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." This gracious assurance of the Redeemer relieved his mind amidst the anxieties and fears which arose to trouble him,—"I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you." When he received the intelligence of her death, he endeavoured to glorify God by a meek submission to his will, and by the exercise of the hope of the Gospel. I have heard him mention the following as one of the texts of Scripture which poured balm into his heart:—"Knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord:—willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."*

After completing his theological course, he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Associate Presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline, July 25th, 1757. The first Sabbath after his license he preached at Kennoway on these words:—Isaiah, l. 8.—"He is near that justifieth me,"—a subject which shews the early bent of his mind to those elaborate discussions of the doctrines of the Gospel which characterized his ministry through life. He was immediately after this sent to Aberdeen, and appointed to preach there for six Sabbaths. The duty required of him there was by far

* 2 Cor. v. 6. 8.

too severe for so young a preacher. It is indeed good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth, and arduous duty at that period forms habits of exertion which are of the utmost importance in the services of after life; yet there are requirements which no constitution can long support, which are persisted in from the most sordid views, and from which the mild request of the gentle and the diffident obtains no exemption. He wished to do all that was asked; and the efforts which he made brought on him a severe fever, which had almost proved fatal. These words he felt as sweetly expressive of his gratitude on his recovery:—"The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.—O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds."*

He was called by the congregations of Falkirk and of Dunfermline to minister among them. The Associate Synod, to which the matter was referred, appointed him to Falkirk. After the usual preparatory steps, he was ordained to the pastoral care of that congregation, September 6th, 1758, and in the charge of it he continued till his death. On the Lord's day after his ordination, he preached on the pious resolution of the apostle Paul,—"I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Such was the grand theme which he selected for his doctrine; in its power over his people he looked for the happiness of his ministry; and the longer he lived, he felt and testified more strongly that Christ

* Psalm cxvi. 6, 16.

was all. Endowed with great vigour of mind, and having formed habits of close and well-directed study, his knowledge as a divine was uncommon both in extent and accuracy; his discourses were distinguished by profound and enlarged views of evangelical truth, and were always closed with a very earnest enforcement of its practical influence. On sacramental solemnities, the death of Christ, in the various views given of it in Scripture, was exhibited in the spirit of one who gloried in the cross, and who delighted to stir up every gift that was in him, to honour the memory of the Saviour, and to animate the devotion of saints.

In the course of his ministry he explained to his people the Book of Job, the Psalms, the Prophecies of Ezekiel, the Gospels of Matthew, and Mark, and John, and almost all the Epistles, and illustrated, in a long course of sermons, the Assembly's Shorter Catechism. The Deity and the atonement of Christ; the covenants of works and grace; the law and Gospel in their relations and distinctions; justification by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus; and the nature, the importance, and the obligations of practical religion, in its various branches, were exhibited with great force of argument, and with that amplitude of illustration which their importance required. It was his custom, when any opinion subversive of evangelical doctrine was propagated, to point out its erroneous nature and pernicious tendency; and such was his mild spirit, that in his hands controversy was managed without any of that acrimony and abuse by which truth has been sometimes maintained at the expense of charity.

He felt none of that hesitation to inculcate morality

which has been ascribed (in many cases very unjustly) to systematic preachers, but shewed equal zeal for practical goodness as for sound principle. In his sermons there was nothing flimsy or puerile, but all was solid and judicious. He delighted to elucidate the most abstruse topics, and to improve them into lessons of goodness.

His manner as a speaker was characterized by gravity and simplicity. His style was unadorned, but never vulgar; and while, as was common in his time, he employed various technical phrases of systematic theology, he explained their meaning where he judged it necessary. He wished to carry with him the judgment, the conscience, and the heart, in all his illustrations.

His utterance was rapid, but not vehement or monotonous; and his whole manner was that of a man engrossed by his subject. His heart often melted in the application of his sermons; and with all that simple pathos which seldom fails to win upon the soul, he comforted mourners in Zion, and besought sinners to be reconciled to God. At such times he spoke slowly, and in such soothing tones as accorded with his feelings and subject. The profound stillness of his audience, and the tears which flowed down many a cheek, shewed the deep interest which these addresses excited.

His diligence as a minister was uncommon. During a part of the year, he delivered four discourses every Lord's day,—visited and catechised his congregation once every year,—had weekly meetings with the young for their religious improvement, and every two years examined all the communicants under his

charge, that he might mark the evidences of their growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, encourage the timid, direct the perplexed, and rouse the backslider to return to the kindness of his youth.

He was peculiarly attentive to the sick; and such was the veneration in which he was held in the place, that his visits were often solicited by the afflicted in other denominations, and most frankly were they paid. He never declined to visit the scene of distress however great the distance, however inclement the weather, however unseasonable the hour, however infectious the malady, or however poor or worthless the object. In the spirit of his Lord and Saviour, he delighted in acts of kindness and mercy, and was often the honoured instrument of rousing the thoughtless to serious reflection, relieving the tempted, and comforting the mourner. To the fatherless and the desolate he approved himself a counsellor, a guardian, and a friend; and I have frequently heard from such persons his care of their youth mentioned in the language of melting gratitude. These labours were not like those which result from mere enthusiasm, eccentric or ostentatious in their mode, or soon intermitted, but were continued with undeviating regularity, and were dictated by a pious attachment to the service of Christ, and by a disinterested wish to promote the best interests of his people.

It has been sometimes said, that ministers thus active, are not very attentive to their private studies, and that in the pulpit they disgust their hearers by the continual recurrence of the same topics, or by the

flimsy manner in which their subjects are illustrated, and in some cases there has been too much reason for such a charge, but in his case it was never made. He seldom went to the pulpit without an accurate study of his subject, and it was impossible to listen to him, whatever was the theme, without being struck with his profound and extensive views of it, and perceiving that his reflections were those of no common mind. He had capacities for activity which he delighted to employ, and in the exercise of these in the course of his ministry he renewed his strength. His constitution was vigorous, and he enjoyed unbroken health. He was an early riser, and in the coldest season of the year devoted several hours in the morning to reading and meditation. He spent none of his time in those amusements to which some devote so many of their hours which might be otherwise employed; nor did he wish to indulge in "vain conversation;" and though such was the liberality of his mind that he made himself acquainted with many of the literary productions of the day, his chief attention was devoted to the knowledge suited to his profession, and which might qualify him for being useful to his people. The influence of such a ministry must have been considerable. To not a few it was the power of God to salvation. Many of his hearers attained a respectable measure of theological knowledge, and the moral virtues flourished under the influence of the Gospel. Often have I heard, in the scene of affliction, his name mentioned as the father who had begotten them to God through the Gospel,—as the counsellor who had guided them through perplexities

and straits, and as the comforter who, in the hour of sorrow, had put gladness into their hearts. Years have elapsed since his death, yet I often hear his sentiments quoted, his worth acknowledged, and his memory blessed.

He was the second in the church to which he belonged who dispensed the Lord's Supper twice in the year; and he, when the practice was far from being common, improved the striking memento of the lapse of time given by the commencement of a new year in a set discourse. In this conduct, we see a liberality of mind disposed to adopt every expedient which was calculated to promote the spiritual welfare of his people; and that it proceeded from no affectation of singularity or love of novelty, was evident in the firmness with which he opposed various plausible innovations.

His prayers were simple and scriptural in their style, grave in their manner, serious in their spirit, and well adapted for the excitement and expression of devotional feeling. It was his custom in his prayer after sermon, to turn, in a few appropriate sentences, its leading ideas into petitions to God; thus were they rooted in the minds of the hearers, and thus were they taught dependence on God for the success of his word. The Psalms which he selected for praise were singularly appropriate; and he has remarked, that it must be ignorance of that book, or studying it under the influence of a false scheme of exposition, which represents it as little imbued with evangelical sentiment and feeling.

Let us now view his conduct in the ecclesiastical courts of which he was a member. With such pru-

dence did he manage the affairs of his own session and congregation, that, for the greater part of his ministry, all was harmony and peace. For some time after his ordination, animosities and strifes, the result of the party-spirit too often produced in a long vacancy, gave him some uneasiness; yet, by his wise and conciliating conduct, they were soon suppressed, and for many years it was the scene of uninterrupted concord. He maintained its peace not by artifices or by servility, both of which he abhorred, but by avoiding every symptom of partiality, and a weak scrupulosity about trifles,—by the uniform uprightness of his conduct, and by that benignant manner by which the heart is won, and by which the heart is kept.

Though for many years he was at a considerable distance from the place of the meeting of presbytery, he attended punctually, and in that court, and in the synod, he was an active and useful member. He seldom made long speeches, but in every case of importance he expressed his opinion of what ought to be done, and his suggestions were so mild and so reasonable, that they were generally adopted. He was four times elected moderator of the Associate Synod. This was an honour not of his seeking, but was the fair result of the estimation in which he was held for the qualities of mind and manners required in that chair. He presided at the ordination of the Rev. Robert Campbell at Stirling, the companion of his youth, and his intimate friend through life, and strenuously supported him in his induction there, against a virulent opposition stimulated by envy and disappointment. Mr Campbell was a man distinguished for his elo-

quence and taste. Dignity and grace were united in his manner, as a public speaker, in a degree which I have never seen equalled; and were employed under the impulse of fervent piety, to give effect to discourses rich in the counsels of Christian experience, and in delineations of the Christian character.

He presided also at the ordination of the Rev. Samuel Kinloch, Paisley,—a man whom he highly respected for his extensive knowledge of theology, the probity of his character, his mild and unobstrusive deportment, and his exemplary kindness and hospitality. He was appointed, along with the Rev. James Moir of Tarbolton, commissioner to the Associate Synod in Ireland, to cultivate brotherly kindness betwixt the two bodies. The scenes through which he passed in his journey, suggested to his mind many interesting reflections; and he used to say that he saw much in Ireland to excite the gratitude, the pity, and the zeal of his native land.

He was one of the committee which was appointed to arrange a scheme for the benefit of the widows of the ministers in the Associate Synod, and had several communications with Dr Webster respecting it. That great and good man, after having matured a plan of this kind, which has proved such a blessing to the Church of Scotland, was willing to give every assistance in his power to the formation of a similar scheme for that part of the Secession. The plan was arranged, but unhappily it was not carried into effect. It was violently opposed where it should have been supported; and the proposal of annual collections in congregations in aid of its funds, was resisted as what

would not be permitted in some of them, nor long practised in any.

He was also one of a committee which was nominated to draw up an approved account of the principles and progress of the Secession; and of another which met with a deputation from the Antiburgher Synod to attempt a reunion of the two bodies of Seceders. The conference was conducted with good temper on both sides; but the way was not then prepared for it, and it was reserved to be the result of the pouring out of the Spirit of love and power in the present day, which has brought Christians of different parties into co-operation, dissipated their prejudices, and fashioned their hearts alike.

He was appointed, along with some others, to draw up a warning against Socinianism, at a time when this dreadful heresy was artfully disseminated. His last efforts in church courts were devoted to the support of an overture for a more explicit recognition of the great principles of religious liberty. This laudable object was artfully misrepresented, and the friends of it were, in some quarters, subjected to much obloquy, yet his firmness was never shaken amidst the tumults of the people, and his mild wisdom was happily adapted to soften and to convince opponents.

He was frequently deputed to restore societies at variance to harmony and peace, and for this his meekness and prudence singularly qualified him. By his influence, dissensions in families, in neighbourhoods, and in congregations, have been healed,—and he has left the place, which had been the scene of animosity and strife, with blessings on his head from those whose

happiness had been restored in the return of concord and benevolence.

Firmly attached as he was to the religious denomination in which he ministered, he lived in terms of friendly intercourse with the good of all parties. He never spoke of what was faulty in other parties in terms of invective or exultation, and was ready to give ample praise to every thing about them worthy of commendation. He hailed the formation of the London Missionary Society as a noble effort of piety and mercy, and anticipated the mighty influence it would have in exciting and directing the energies of the Christian world. He saw only the tree planted, but what a variety of branches have we seen issuing from its stem, and scattering, by every wind of heaven, their leaves for the healing of nations!

As a member of political society, the sequestered sphere in which he moved precluded him from much share in the transactions of the day, but his behaviour was uniformly such as became the friend of his country and of mankind. When the spirit was awakened, which, after a long struggle with avarice and corruption, triumphed in the abolition of the African Slave Trade, he did what he could to rouse the attention of his people to this national iniquity, and to excite their sympathy with the suffering negroes, and made great exertions to obtain numerous signatures in the town and neighbourhood to a petition to parliament for the termination of that dreadful traffic. The voice of mercy has at last prevailed,—the stain of that commerce is now wiped from our flag, and the countries which, in spite of our remonstrances, still

pursue it, exhibit in their agitations, the preludes of a storm in which Africa shall be avenged in the desolation of her oppressors. In this memorable contest, we see the power of public opinion, and that the friends of humanity have no reason, amidst opposing influence, policy, or talent, to despair of the success of its cause.

Towards the close of his course, the French revolution took place. He dreaded, at the first eruption of that volcano, which spread firebrands, arrows, and death around, that from the corrupted principles and morals of that people, and from the frivolity of their habits, they were not ripe for the enjoyment of rational freedom. The attempts which were made to propagate their principles in this country he zealously opposed, and inculcated submission to legal authority for the Lord's sake. To his influence it was owing that various attempts to call seditious meetings, under specious pretexts, proved abortive. Little were many at that time aware that the cry for liberty and equality was the watch-word of revolution, and that the demagogues, who had not then thrown off the mask, were actuated by a virulent hatred of Christianity, as in their conceit the ally of tyranny, and as inculcating, in its gentle and passive virtues, a temper fit only for slaves. They who could discern the signs of the times saw to what they tended, and gave warning.

When some, at that period of alarm, represented Dissenters as hostile to the government of their country, his name furnished, in his own sphere, a direct refutation of this wicked charge, a charge which was

the fabrication of bigotry and malignant prejudice, and which never obtained the least credit with those who were acquainted with their principles, history, and character.

To his benignant spirit war and carnage were most opposite; but more repugnant to it still was the subjugation of his native land, and the destruction of our civil and religious institutions. He anxiously watched the progress of the French revolution,—and, amid the frequent changes of its ruling factions, often expressed his opinion that that country, sick of their cabals and murders, would settle in a military despotism under some bold and crafty general. The remark was often made at that time when these cruelties were detailed, that God was making inquisition for blood and avenging the murder of his dear saints on the descendants of those that slew them. Aware that this was sometimes suggested to palliate their excesses, he stated, that though he believed this to be the case, this neither lessened their crime, nor should check our abhorrence of their enormities. God makes the wrath of man to praise him, but in that wrath man acts with no view to his glory, and with no impulse but his own passions.

In his family his mild and affectionate disposition qualified him for peculiar enjoyment in domestic happiness. Two years after his ordination, he was married to a young lady in his own congregation, whom God made an eminent blessing to him and to their numerous family. The strong sense of religion rendered her a suitable associate in every holy scene; her hope in God solaced him in every discouragement;

she never left her proper sphere, nor shrunk from its hardest duties; her mild wisdom and her godly sincerity gave the happiest influence to her sentiments and counsels; in her humility and condescension were united with a noble disdain of all that is mean and frivolous; her domestic management relieved him of every care, and kept her dwelling in uniform neatness and comfort; her kind attention to visitors gratified the hospitality of his temper, and her active goodness was the blessing of her neighbourhood. Such was her character, and her sudden translation to heaven from the very scene and act of devotion, was an appropriate close to a life which had been in truth a walk with God.

His family was the rest of his heart,—his solicitude for their happiness was never intermitted,—his efforts for their improvement were never relaxed. His seasons of private devotion were marked by the youngest with reverential interest, and from the closet of prayer he returned with a countenance the index of a heart sanctified and gladdened by piety, to bless his household by the intercourse of kindness and the counsels of wisdom. It was in his family that his benignity was most apparent. Some who have maintained courtesy before the world have made their families unhappy by their harshness or their repining, but where his heart was most opened it was felt to be most affectionate. It was his delight to say or to do whatever would contribute to their happiness. Yet his was not the weak indulgence in which authority is lost, nor the indiscreet condescension by which petulance is encouraged; but his kindness was so chastened by wis-

dom, that it was not trifled with nor abused, and it was sought in attention to his comfort and in obedience to his will.

His attention to the religious instruction of his family was not confined to the evenings of the Lord's day, but was often manifested at other seasons. There was such a sweetness in his mode of teaching, that the scene and hour of tuition was never gloomy, but always pleasant. He listened to the tasks of his children not merely with patience, but with evident interest,—and the temptation to negligence was repressed not so much by the terror of his frown as the hope of his approbation. His advices were singularly solemn, tender, and appropriate, and the directions he gave them as to prayer were happily adapted to guide the youthful mind to devotion. It was his care to obtain for them suitable books, and to examine what information they had derived and what impressions they had felt in their perusal, and such were often his inquiries after their attendance on religious ordinances. These labours of love were seconded with unwearied assiduity in the pious and enlightened care of a mother whose heart was devoted to their best interests, and whose manner was marked by the beauty of holiness.

The death of his first son, when a child eleven months old, was his first domestic sorrow; and the subject on which he discoursed to his people after the funeral was the answer of the Shunamite to the question, "Is it well with the child?" She said, "It is well." This portion of Scripture beautifully pointed out the hope which he entertained, and the resigna-

tion which he was exercising. He was willing to make many sacrifices for the sake of his children, and through the admirable economy of his partner, limited as his income was, he gave them all a respectable education. His second son went out to his uncle in Jamaica. This amiable young man died in a few weeks after his arrival in that island. The death of friends at a distance from us is peculiarly afflicting; and the heart bleeds at the thought that they are gone without one testimony of our sympathy and love.—After receiving this sad intelligence he preached on the tears of the Saviour at the grave of Lazarus, and sought relief to his sorrow in the comforts of his compassion.

His third son he, at great expense, educated for the medical profession. His talents were of the highest order, and his skill in his profession was warmly attested by the best judges. After practising for a few months in this country, he obtained a surgeoncy in the army; and, under the patronage of General Abercrombie, went to the West Indies. The gallant son of that great man was the colonel of the regiment, and his intimate friend; and after serving in the capture of several islands, and advancing from one regiment to another, he was stationed in Dominica with the charge of the whole medical staff in it. The highest situations in his profession were opening before him, when, after two days' illness, he fell a victim to the yellow fever. The deepest regret of both officers and men accompanied him to his grave. To the former he had recommended himself by his honourable principles, his intelligence, his activity in his duty, his agreeable manners, and his strict probity; and to the

latter, he was endeared by his humanity, skill, and unwearied attention. When the tidings of his death came to his friends, his father was recovering slowly from a severe attack of the disease of which he afterwards died, and it is easy to conceive what a shock this must have been in his feeble and languid state, yet he bore it with great fortitude, laboured to assuage the grief of his family, and thus expressed his acquiescence in the will of Heaven:—"I must say with Jacob, Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, but with him I will not say all these things are against me, for that is no longer mine which God claims, and I believe that his darkest paths are mercy." He had resumed preaching a few Sabbaths before; and, in tender indulgence to his colleague, as well as in love to his duty, he preached on the afternoon of the next Lord's day on the resignation of Job under his domestic trials; and there were two ideas on which he dwelt in a very pathetic manner: "That the removal of our dearest comforts is to be viewed as the act of Jehovah, who shews his sovereignty in the place, the season, and the mode of it; and that they are removed by the hand which bestowed them." What an edifying spectacle is resignation thus founded in wisdom and piety!

His fourth son was educated for the ministry; and never can he forget the solemn representations of his father, of the piety, wisdom, and zeal required in that office, of its tremendous responsibility, of the rewards promised to the faithful pastor, and of the doom of him who should disgrace that function by the spirit of the world, or by the error of the wicked. He felt the deepest interest in the progress of his studies; and

when he was licensed to preach the Gospel, this was the animating charge by which he encouraged one so young under a trust so solemn:—"My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

He was called by the congregation to be his colleague and successor. In consequence of two other calls to him, it became necessary that the Synod should determine in which of the places he was to labour. On that occasion his father made a speech from the fulness of his heart in favour of his people's claim; and when that court, by an unanimous decision, appointed him to be minister in Falkirk, he regarded it as the sanction of Heaven to a relation which should unite his son more closely to him. He rejoiced in it not merely as what might be his solace in advanced life, and a comfort to his family, but as likely to maintain the peace of his congregation, and most earnest were his prayers that it might contribute to advance their best interests.

When the ordination took place he presided in it. The subject of his discourse was Acts xx. 28,—"Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." His exhortations on that occasion were solemn, affectionate, and faithful, like those of David to Solomon, his son, when he said to him,—"Thou Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou

forsake him he will cast thee off for ever."* Cordiality perfect and uninterrupted blessed this connexion, nor could it be embittered by any of those feelings which sometimes have rendered such situations so miserable. The apostle Paul beautifully says of Timothy,—"As a son with a father, he served with me in the Gospel,"—words expressing their harmonious and affectionate co-operation in the work of the Lord, and they were fully realized in this conjunction in the ministry, where affection in the one case was mingled with entire confidence, and in the other with the highest respect. What a blessing was such a situation to one ordained to the ministry at twenty years of age! Its advantages and its pleasures must be objects of his grateful remembrance to his dying day.

Mr B. felt, and in as far as was suitable, expressed a strong interest in every plan which was formed for the benefit of the place where he resided. Two of the greatest works in Scotland were begun and completed during his incumbency within the bounds of his charge; and while his highest gratification arose from the improvement of the labouring classes in knowledge, sobriety, and peaceableness, he felt pleasure in marking the prosperity of both, and the melioration of the neighbourhood in its agriculture, wealth, and population in consequence of them.

In associating with his own congregation, his deportment was so affectionate and cheerful as to give double weight to his lessons of instruction. In his

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

intercourse with others there was such a frankness and mildness in his manner, that his company was much valued. Such was his prudence, that he passed through the most trying situations with propriety, and such his benignity and sweetness of temper, that wherever he went it won him universal regard. His conversation was so instructive and so cheerful, and wisdom and piety appeared in his discourse and manners in so pleasing a form, that those who enjoyed his society retired from it not merely gratified but improved. Richly stored as his mind was with knowledge, the simple and the inexperienced were never abashed before him, and eminent as he was in sanctity, the youngest said they loved him, for he was so mild and so good. Into whatever family he entered, his benignity allured the young to his side, and while he gratified himself by seeing them happy, and by tracing their tempers and capacity, he would suggest a pious counsel in language so simple as to be understood, and in so engaging a manner that it could not but be relished. It was his study to do good to all. He felt a strong compassion for sinners, and was eager to reclaim them, and no personal injury could render him implacable. He was easy to be entreated, and ready to forgive.

If there was any favourable circumstance in any character, or incident which was brought under review, he delighted to notice it. On a particular occasion, when some severe remarks had been made on an absent individual, which he had heard in silence, he said,—" Has he not a single good quality ? If he has, it is more pleasant to dilate on it ; if you think

he has not, it is more necessary for you to pray that he may become a new creature. He for whom we pray to God will not be the object of our invective to man."

He had a rich fund of anecdotes, and his manner of relating them was truly interesting. His conversation was never degraded by the conjectures of impertinent curiosity, or the stories of the tale-bearer. Slander, in every form, he detested, but especially where it appeared in the air and in the language of sanctimony. His remarks on public affairs were judicious and temperate, and it was his study to point out the divine agency in the striking events of the day, and the moral purposes which Jehovah was accomplishing. He never could be the tool of any faction or party, and it was his great wish to approve himself the faithful monitor of another world.

Whatever the conversation was which was carrying on, when he was called to address the throne of grace in any act of devotion, he improved it in a manner marked by judgment and delicacy, into a subject of gratitude, or confession, or supplication, to the Most High. There are not many who are qualified to do this with propriety, but the anticipation of it would have a salutary influence on our social intercourse, and when it is done well, it will dispose us to rejoice with trembling. It was at an early hour that he retired from company. However agreeable it was, and however urgent the solicitation might be for his stay, he was firm to his purpose of departing. Little is lost by quitting early the house of mirth.

It was seldom that the swearer set his mouth against

the heavens in his presence; when this was the case, the reproof was administered with such solemnity and address, as, instead of exasperating the offender, called forth his acknowledgments, and prevented the repetition of the offence. Several instances of this might be detailed did our limits admit, and they would show the best method of giving efficacy to admonition.

His opinion of books was never rashly given, and when he either praised or condemned, it was the result of deliberate inquiry into their merits or defects. Sermons glittering with ornament, and in which the doctrines of the Gospel are never mentioned, or are stated only to be denied or perverted, he could not endure. When he met with persons who were captivated by their tinsel eloquence, or deceived by their specious pretences, he exposed their delusion. The books he recommended were those of masters in Israel, rich in evangelical sentiment, and however homely in their exterior, he said they were all glorious within.

He took much pleasure in the society of his brethren. With several of them he maintained an affectionate correspondence; and what strikingly shews the kindness of his heart, he felt much delighted in the society of young ministers, and the greatest complacency in their promising appearance and popularity.

The scowl of pharisaic austerity never darkened his countenance, nor did envy ever rankle in his heart. The student was always welcome to his house, his library, and his table. With much fidelity and kindness he suggested what he thought necessary for their guidance, and after their public appearances, where censure had been passed on their discourses, either

unmerited, or more severe than was necessary, he uniformly interposed in their behalf.

It is a most interesting part of his character, that though in every scene in which he mingled he was looked up to with respect and veneration, he was a very humble man, and never encouraged flattery or applause, from whatever quarter it came. No solicitation could prevail on him to appear before the world as an author. He seldom wrote his discourses fully, and left none of them prepared for publication. He wished that his ministry might live in the virtues of his people, and had no desire for any other memorial. He never went to the pulpit without a strong impression of his own insufficiency, and looking above man to God.

As a proof of the superiority of his spirit, this little circumstance deserves to be mentioned. When he was told, that one who had once loudly applauded his sermons, from versatility or prejudice, had become as vehement in his censure, this was his meek reply: "His approbation never lifted me up, nor can his abuse cast me down. It is a small matter to be judged of man's judgment, he that judgeth me is the Lord."

While such was his spirit in regard to the opinion of others respecting himself, he could not bear to see a minister of any denomination treated with incivility, and the following incident is mentioned as an instance of amiable candour and liberality: Having gone to a distant part of the country to attend the funeral of a friend, he was ushered into a large chamber filled with the acquaintances of the deceased, and was re-

quested to officiate in the usual exercise of devotion. After he sat down, he observed in a corner of the room one with the appearance of a clergyman, and on inquiry, learned that it was Mr W., the person lately ordained minister of the parish. This man, though of unexceptionable character, from the total want of popular talents was the object of universal dislike, and when his ordination took place, after a violent and protracted opposition, the parish-church was almost entirely deserted, and the prejudice was so strong against him, that when he mingled with the people, no marks of attention or respect were paid to him. Much as Mr Belfrage disapproved of his induction, he felt for him on account of the rude treatment he was receiving, and insisted that he should be invited to close the service. This he did at his request. They walked together in friendly conversation to the church-yard, and when they parted, Mr W., to whom such attentions were rare, expressed his gratitude for this politeness from a stranger in terms which shewed how much he could be wounded by incivility and gratified by kindness. Mr B. sometimes alluded to this incident as a proof of the bad tempers which the rigorous exercise of patronage produces, and of the unhappy state in which such a man must live, unless his heart is cast in another mould than that of Mr W.

There were two incidents which occurred during his ministry, which deserve to be mentioned as striking instances of the care of Providence. On a Lord's day, while engaged in public worship, an apartment in the manse, which was adjoining to the church,

took fire, and before it was discovered by the servant, who was in the house with the children, the hangings of the bed and part of the furniture in the chamber were in flames. She called out one of the door-keepers, and a few of the people who sat nearest to it, and by their exertions the fire was extinguished. Mr B., while discoursing, observed the people go out, and though afraid that something was wrong, from the whispers and anxious looks he observed in that quarter, he was able to bring the service to a proper conclusion. When he came and saw what had been done, and thought what might have been the case, he called his family to join him in devout acknowledgments of God's preserving goodness, and went to the pulpit in the afternoon with a spirit rejoicing in God his Saviour.

The other instance took place at the dispensation of the Lord's supper, May 25th, 1766. The day was exceedingly wet, and the church was crowded to excess. About the middle of the action sermon, a loud crack was heard from one of the galleries, and a dreadful scene of shrieking and struggling to escape took place. He stood still in the pulpit in great anxiety as to what might be the issue; his brother-in-law, the Rev. Mr Patison, Edinburgh, was sitting behind him, and he rose and entreated the people to be calm, and desired any carpenters who might be present to go and inspect the supporters of the gallery, and to take such measures as were necessary for its security. Some of them went, and found that the cause of the alarm had been the sliding of a beam. A prop was applied to it, and in a few minutes all was quiet. Mr

Belfrage then called on the congregation to join in singing these eight lines in the 107th psalm:

The storm is changed into a calm
At his command and will;
So that the waves, which raged before,
Now quiet are and still.
Then are they glad, because at rest,
And quiet now they be;
So to the haven he them brings,
Which they desired to see.

He then resumed his discourse, and finished it with much energy. This was a season favourable for the excitement of serious impressions; and while many have talked of that solemnity in reference to the singularity of the scene which marked it, not a few have spoken of it as the period when the power and mercy of the Saviour were experienced, and when the topic of that day's sermon was strongly felt in the experience of abundance of grace, in the reception of the gift of righteousness, and in the hope of reigning in life by Jesus Christ. It was noted by the pastor as a day in which the hand of the Lord was especially with him.

The conduct thus delineated shews not merely the reality, but the strength of his personal religion. From the modesty of his temper, he never spoke much of his pious experiences; but were it necessary, or proper, I might shew the power of godliness operating in his frequency in secret prayer, in his delight in the perusal of books of devotion, in his acknowledging God in all his ways, in the holy conversation which he maintained in his dwelling, in his care to trace the hand of God in all that he met with, and in the tenderness of his conscience. I might also state the manner in which, from the abundance of the heart,

he expatiated on the excellencies of the Redeemer, the workings of holy affection; and most acutely did he point out the difference betwixt these and the emotions of nature, the blessedness of the religious life, the grounds, the influence, and the felicity of his own hope in Christ; but I will only say, that his family cannot recall the scene of such communications without feelings which remind them of those of the two disciples, when they said, "Did not our hearts burn within us when he talked with us by the way, and opened up to us the scriptures."

In his long illness, he was enabled to suffer as a Christian. He had enjoyed unbroken health during his whole incumbency, except in the summer of 1763, when he laboured under the ague, and went for some time to the Highlands to recruit his strength. His soul melted for the people around him, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd, and weak as he was, he preached every Lord's day to the crowds that assembled round his lodgings. Numbers of people came to attend family worship morning and evening, and to them he addressed religious counsel. From that season he laboured without the intermission of a single Sabbath till the summer of 1797, when he had a most violent attack of a calculous disorder, with which he had been slightly affected on some occasions before. On the first Lord's day after, his colleague preached in the forenoon, and rode off to assist in the dispensation of the Lord's supper at Dunblane. Finding himself somewhat easier, he determined to preach in the afternoon. The psalm he read out in the commencement of worship was the 77th, from the first to

the 5th verse, a portion so strikingly descriptive of his feelings and sufferings, that the reading of it drew tears from the eyes of many. He preached on Matt. xiv. 27th,—"It is I; be not afraid,"—words most soothing to the heart in fear and sorrow. In two days his disorder returned with increased violence, and for several weeks he endured the most excruciating pain, yet never did a murmur escape from his lips. He on various occasions, during that season, alluded to the agony of our Lord, and said, "That agony was produced by the wrath of God due to the sins of an elect world, but I am suffering under the hand of a Father." His mind then turning to Christ in his agony, praying more earnestly, he said, "Oh that the Spirit of grace and of supplication would help my infirmities," and in sighs and groans which could not be uttered made his requests known to God. I said to him Christ suffered, being tried, that he might be able to succour them that are tried, he added, "and I know he is willing." He alluded to the neglect our Lord met with from his disciples in his sufferings, and contrasted it with the kindness of his children, and the unremitted care of his partner, who watched by his side, ever eager to sooth and ready to support. When his illness had continued for some time, he said, "I have had many years of unbroken health, and have I received so much good at the hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil also? This is but light affliction in comparison of what I deserve, and it is but for a moment."

It pleased God to revive him again in the end of September, and he preached regularly one discourse

on the Lord's day through the winter, and took a part in the pastoral duties of the week; but in the spring his disorder recurred with great severity, and continued with little abatement till his strength was exhausted. He preached some discourses before this attack, on Lamentations iii. 24,—"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him;" and the last sermon which he delivered was on Deuteronomy xxxiii. 25,—"As thy days are, so shall thy strength be." It was by meditation on the faith of Jeremiah in a dreary period that he was prepared for the scene of trial; and it was by this assurance of suitable aid and comfort that he was enabled to believe, that he should not faint in the day of adversity, and that he should be upheld in suffering according to the will of God, whatever might be the length or the severity of his affliction.

Though unable to preach after the first Sabbath of April, he attended public worship till near the end of that month, when his pain and debility increased to such a degree, that he could not leave his apartment. In this great fight of affliction he was as meek and devout as before. To a friend who called on him and said, It is a great matter to get above the fear of death, he replied, "It is an interest in Christ, which can alone give safety in death, and I trust that I am no stranger to it." He remarked, that faith most effectually repressed the fears of nature and of guilt, and that he looked for stability and vigour to his faith to him who is the Author and the Finisher of faith. His mind seemed to dwell on that title, and he said, "Christ is all in faith; he forms, cherishes, and per-

fects it;" and he added, "he is all to faith." When that text was repeated, "unto you that believe he is precious," he said, "Oh how precious!" It is in such circumstances that the value of Christ's righteousness, grace, and compassion, is most strongly felt. With his support, sickness is light, in his presence separation is easy, and in his arms death is blessed.

While the power of godliness was thus evinced in the resignation of his spirit and the elevation of his hope, the kindness of his affections was manifest in the uniform gentleness of his manner, his solicitude for the interests of his people, and his tender pity for the sorrows of his family. The sufferer was the comforter of the weeping circle, and in death as in life he shewed the path to heaven. To his wife he said, Thy Maker is thine husband; to his children, I have left you all on God; and to his assistant in the ministry, The Lord is God all sufficient, walk before him and be perfect. On the last Sabbath of his life, when he and some others of his family came in from public worship, he said, "My heart was with you, I am trying to raise it to the temple above, where a rest, a Sabbath remaineth for the people of God. I have long preached salvation by Christ, my wish is to join the great multitude above," and with his eye turned to his family he added, "and to be joined by all I love on earth, in singing salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever."

He spoke frequently in his illness of his congregation, expressed his satisfaction that they were not deprived of any religious ordinance by his affliction, commended them to the care of the Shepherd and

Bishop of Souls, implored his gracious acceptance of his ministry, and earnestly prayed that the kingdom of Christ might flourish among them. To his assistant he said, "I have been committing you to the care of the great Apostle and High Priest of our profession. He will be the guide of your youth, and in the light and grace of his presence you shall not miss a father's counsels or kindness."

On the last day of his life his sufferings were extreme, yet his fortitude never failed. Feeble and broken as his voice was, it was heard in the psalms which were sung; he repeatedly intimated his wish that his family should engage in prayer beside him; and while they sat or stood near his bed, they saw in the calmness of his manner the serenity of his mind, and in his looks and gestures the workings of faith, hope, and charity. When he felt his end approaching, he expressed, in a faltering voice, his attachment to his family, declared that Christ was all his hope, and his parting intercession and blessing was his last expression of piety and love. In a short time after it he entered into rest, and, like David, having served his generation according to the will of God, he fell asleep. Agreeably to his own request he was buried before the pulpit in his own chapel, and a monument on its wall commemorates the attachment of his people, the virtues of his character, and the labours of his ministry.

Who can read this narrative without feeling the wish, "Let me live the life of the righteous, and let my last end be like his?" His life was laborious, but it was useful, tranquil, and respected; and though his

death was preceded by severe suffering, it was suffering alleviated by the best comfort, and terminating in everlasting joy.

I shall close this memoir by a sketch of his character, drawn by the Rev. Dr Husband, Dunfermline, whose integrity and judgment were such as to give the highest value to the expressions of his respect and attachment. It was intended for his monument, but the size of the plate did not admit of so long an inscription. Dr Husband has since followed him to the world of glory, and it is with a melancholy pleasure that I record, in the same tribute, my humble testimony to the worth of one whom I loved as my own and my father's friend. It is, as far as I know, the only composition of Dr Husband which has been submitted to the public, and will be considered by all who knew him as worthy of his talents and of his heart.

"IN MEMORY

Of the Rev. JOHN BELFRAGE, pastor of this Associate Congregation, who died May 14th, 1798, in the 63d year of his age and the 40th of his ministry.

"The Father of lights had given to him strong mental powers, which, improved by a just and liberal education, he successfully applied to the study of the oracles of God, and to the preaching of the everlasting Gospel. The solidity of his judgment, matured by habits of close and candid inquiry, was equalled only by the mildness of his manners and the unbending rectitude of his life. His piety, enkindled and purified at the altar of God, was regulated by a well-informed

understanding, and its flame fed by motives supplied from the cross of Christ. By exemplary and unwearied diligence in the duties of his sacred profession, he gained and preserved the esteem of his congregation, who revered and loved him as a father, and leaned on him as a faithful friend. The faith of Christ had formed his heart to every thing that is kind and tender in domestic life, and his family, when they look back on his virtues, feel their hearts at once improved and soothed by the contemplation of a husband's love and of a father's care. That others also may profitably remember him, who for so many years had spoken to them the word of God, and may follow his faith, considering the end of his conversation, the people over whom the Holy Ghost had made him overseer, have erected this small memorial of their beloved minister's worth, and of their own veneration for his memory."

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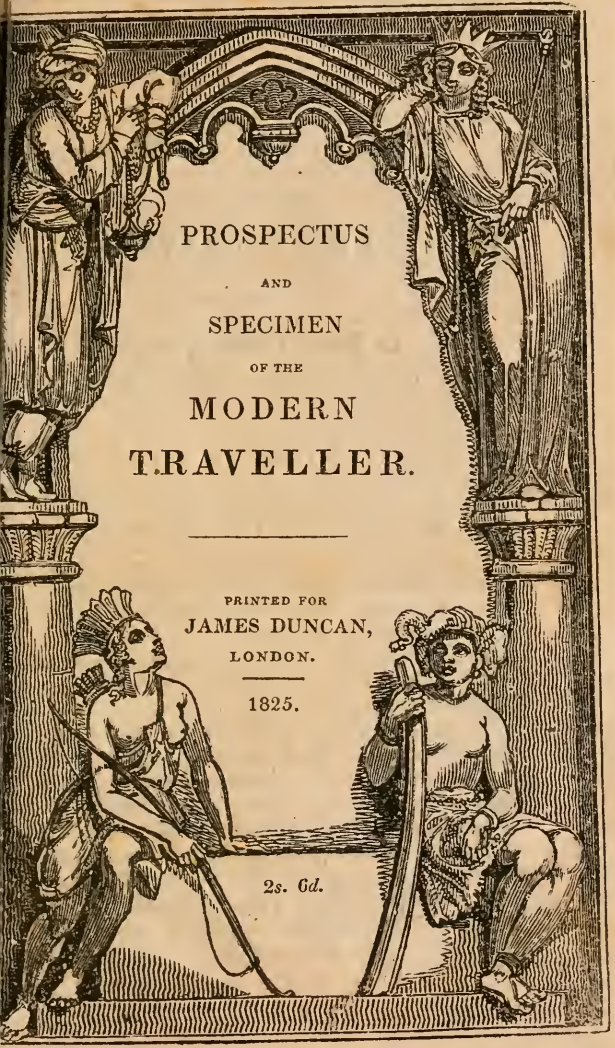

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THE extensive and indefatigable researches of European Travellers during the last five-and-twenty years, in almost every country of the globe, have given in some instances quite a new aspect to our maps, and have furnished the most important accessions to geographical science. They have at the same time equally extended our acquaintance with the physical habits, political institutions, and domestic manners of the several nations of both hemispheres, some of which were previously known only by name. The Travels, for example, of Clarke, Dodwell, Eustace, and Hughes, in Europe; of Morier, Elphinstone, Buchanan, Fraser, Pottinger, Gore Ouseley, Kinneir, and Porter, in Asia; of Belzoni, Lord Valentia, Burckhardt, and Richardson, in Egypt and the adjacent countries; of Lewis and Clarke, Pike and James, in North Ame-

rica; of Luccock, Mawe, and Von Spix, in Brazil; of Humboldt, in Mexico; and of many others, too numerous to mention: comprise an immense mass of curious and valuable information, diffused through costly works, inaccessible to the generality of readers, and forming collectively a moderate library. The transactions of the various Missionary Societies, also, include a very considerable portion of novel information of a strictly geographical and scientific kind, frequently presenting to us savage and uncivilised man under a new and interesting aspect.

With a view to compress this fund of entertaining matter within narrower limits, different collections have been made of the more popular works, on a reduced scale. The series of voyages and travels published in 1800 by Dr. Mavor, extended to no fewer than twenty-eight volumes; and were the collection brought down to the present date, more than twice as many on the same plan would be insufficient to include the works of reputation which have since appeared. Pinkerton's collection forms seventeen volumes in quarto. But, besides the objection to such collections, which arises from their bulk and costliness, they are necessarily liable to that of incompleteness. Some of the best works are the exclusive copyright of individuals. Others, which may be of too scientific a character to be generally interesting, or which may be excluded as of inferior merit, contain details of the most important kind. And there is this further objection to collections, that, in giving the journals of more travellers than one over the same territory, repetition is inevitable; and sometimes conflicting statements occur, which require to be investigated, in order to determine which is the more correct, or how far they may be reconciled.

To obviate these difficulties, and, at the same time, realise the object of compressing and arranging this various mass of information in a popular form, it is proposed to publish a digested account of each separate country, comprising its geographical features, its manners, customs, polity, &c., as they may be gathered from the collective works of the best English and Foreign travellers. The labour employed in such analysis will obviously be immense, and the cost of the materials considerable; but the Proprietors have resolved to spare neither pains nor expense to render the work as comprehensive and complete as possible,—so that it may form, in fact, a depository for the collective stores of our modern explorators and topographers; and present, if the expression may be allowed, a series of *cosmoramic* views of the actual state of the various countries. The publication is obviously designed to be of a popular and useful, rather than of a scientific character; and with this view, authentic anecdotes, serving to illustrate national character, and other amusing details, will be freely admitted. At the same time, the most studious attention will be paid to topographical accuracy; and it will be an object carefully kept in view, to rectify the mistakes which are to be found in the most popular geographical works. Maps will be given on a small scale, but modelled on the best authorities, so as to include the latest discoveries. Brief historical notices will also be prefixed to the description of every country, including its ancient geography, its supposed aborigines, and the principal revolutions of which it has been the theatre. And, with respect to the uncivilised portions of the habitable continent, the sketch will exhibit the progress of discovery. So far as possible, its natural history, botany, geological features, vol-

canic phenomena, and other natural curiosities, will be fully described; together with the costume, physiognomy, and domestic habits of the natives; their traditions, religion, and literature; their public buildings, arts, and ancient monuments: in fact, all the multifarious information for which we are indebted to the indefatigable researches of modern Travellers.

It might, perhaps, give attraction to the work, to throw the whole into the form of fictitious narrative and imaginary travels; and the seductive model of the Travels of Anacharsis has led many modern writers to attempt this plan. But it has been judged, in the present instance, far more expedient, as well as more consistent with the design of the work, to adhere to literal fact and real authorities, and not to aim at imparting a fictitious charm to descriptions and observations, intrinsically interesting alike to the physiologist, the politician, and the general reader.

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table; and conflicting accounts of the same things are repeatedly given, without any directions to the reader as to which is worthy of preference, or how far their discrepancies may be reconciled or accounted for. To obviate these difficulties, the present work proposes to give a complete description of the different countries, forming an accurate and sufficiently minute cosmoramic view of their present actual state. This object is effected partly by adopting the details given by travellers who have visited the different places, in their own language, but generally by a combination of their various accounts, in the language of the editor; to whom, though we have not the slightest conception of who or what he is, this commendation at the least is due, that he has executed his task with great accuracy and judgment."—*Investigator.*

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